THE HISTORY OF

ROCK

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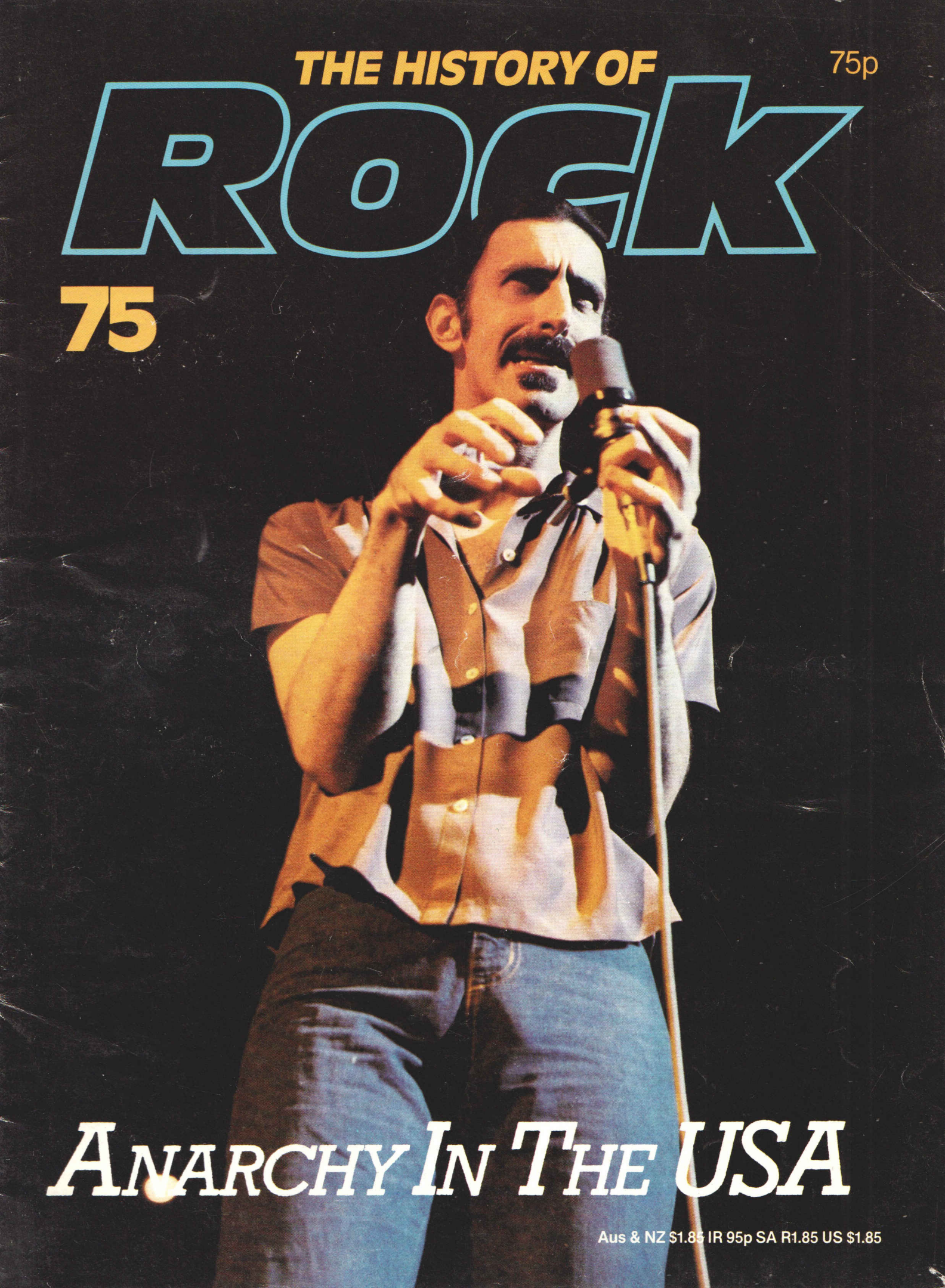

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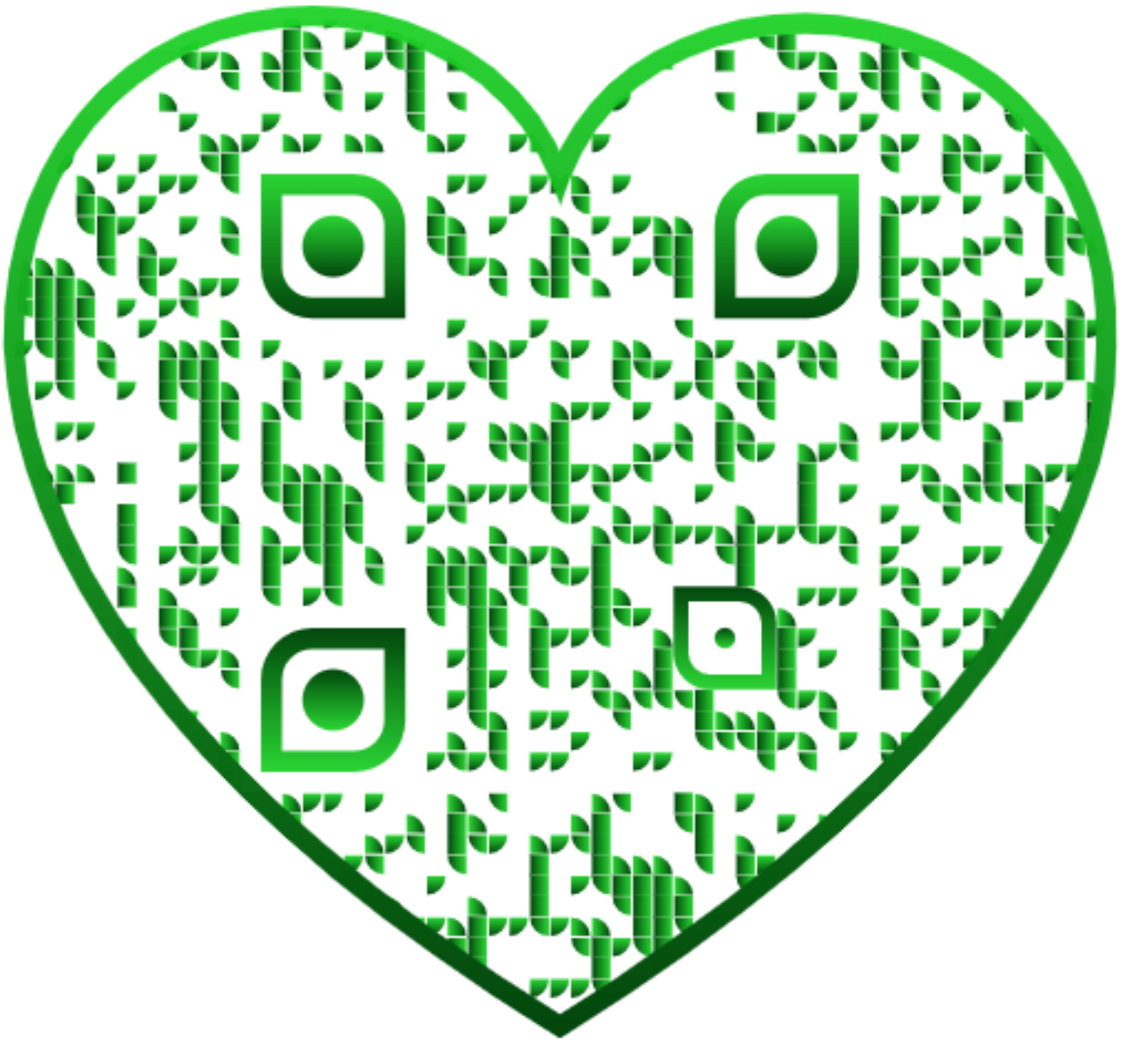
Aus & NZ $1.85 IR 95p SA R1.85 US $1.85



THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 7 Issue 75

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Acknowledgements

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Some ten years on from the 'American Bandstand' school of teen idols that swept to fame in the early Sixties, a new generation of personable heart-throbs made their appearance with sounds aimed firmly at the younger teenager. There was something for everyone: the family appeal of the Osmonds, the thrill of Rollermania, the pretty-boy good looks of David Cassidy contrasting with the seedy charm of David Essex and the leather-clad Alvin Stardust.

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How to obtain copies of The History of Rock Copies are obtainable by placing a regular order at your newsagent or by taking out a subscription. **Subscription rates:** For six months (26 issues) £23.00; for one year (52 issues) £46.00. Send your order and remittance to Rock Subscriptions, Punch Subscriptions Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW., being sure to state the number of the first issue required.

Back numbers **U.K. & Eire:** Back Nos. are obtainable from your newsagent or from **History of Rock** Back Nos. Orbis Publishing Ltd., 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT at cover price. **Australia:** Back Nos. are obtainable from **The History of Rock** Back Nos., Gordon and Gotch (Aus) Ltd, 114 William Street, PO Box 767G, Melbourne, Vic 3001. **New Zealand, South Africa, Europe & Malta:** Back Nos. are available at cover price from your newsagent. In case of difficulty write to the address in your country given for binders. South African readers should add sales tax.

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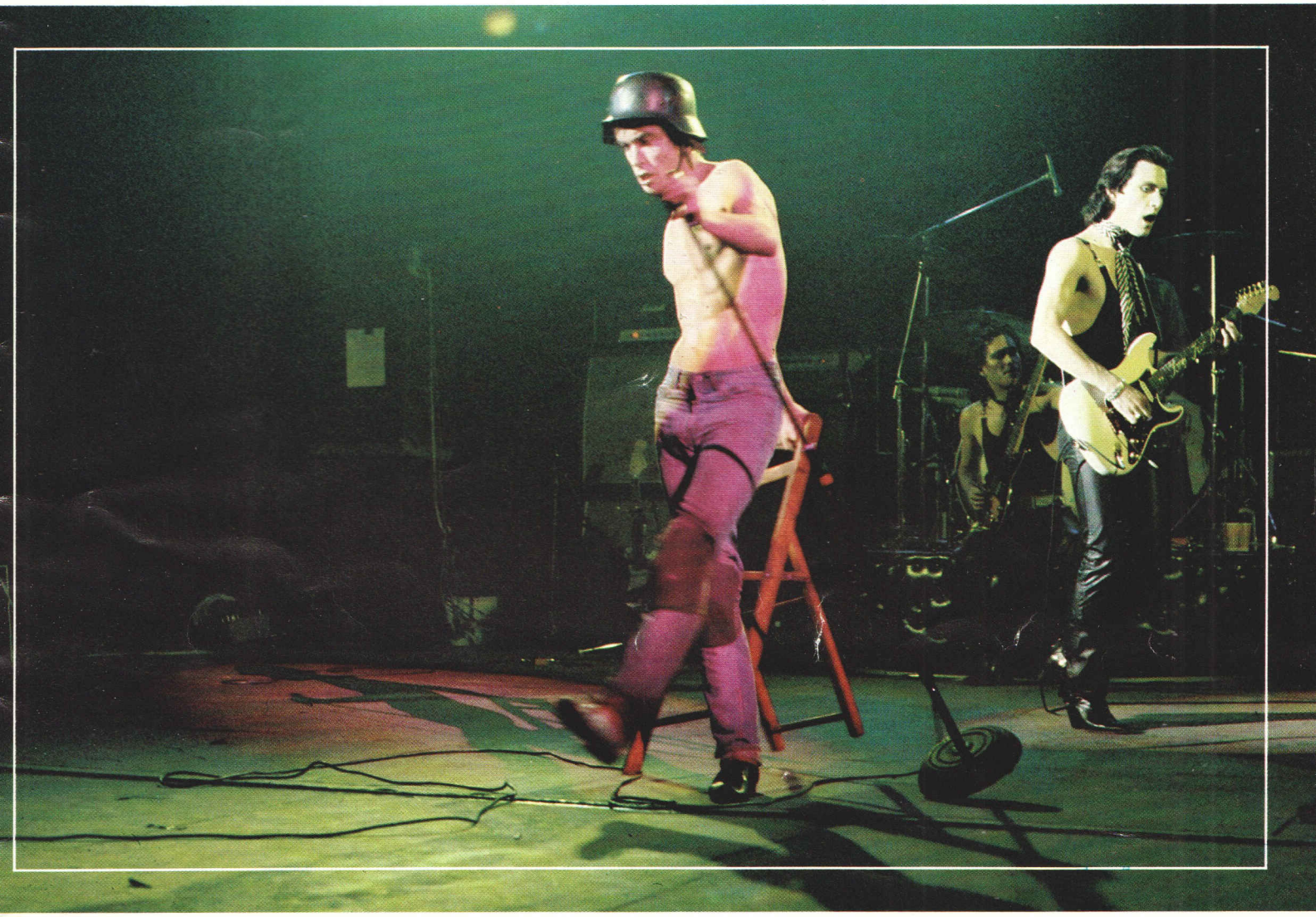
Sounds of Subversion

Discord and confrontation epitomised the flipside of the US rock scene



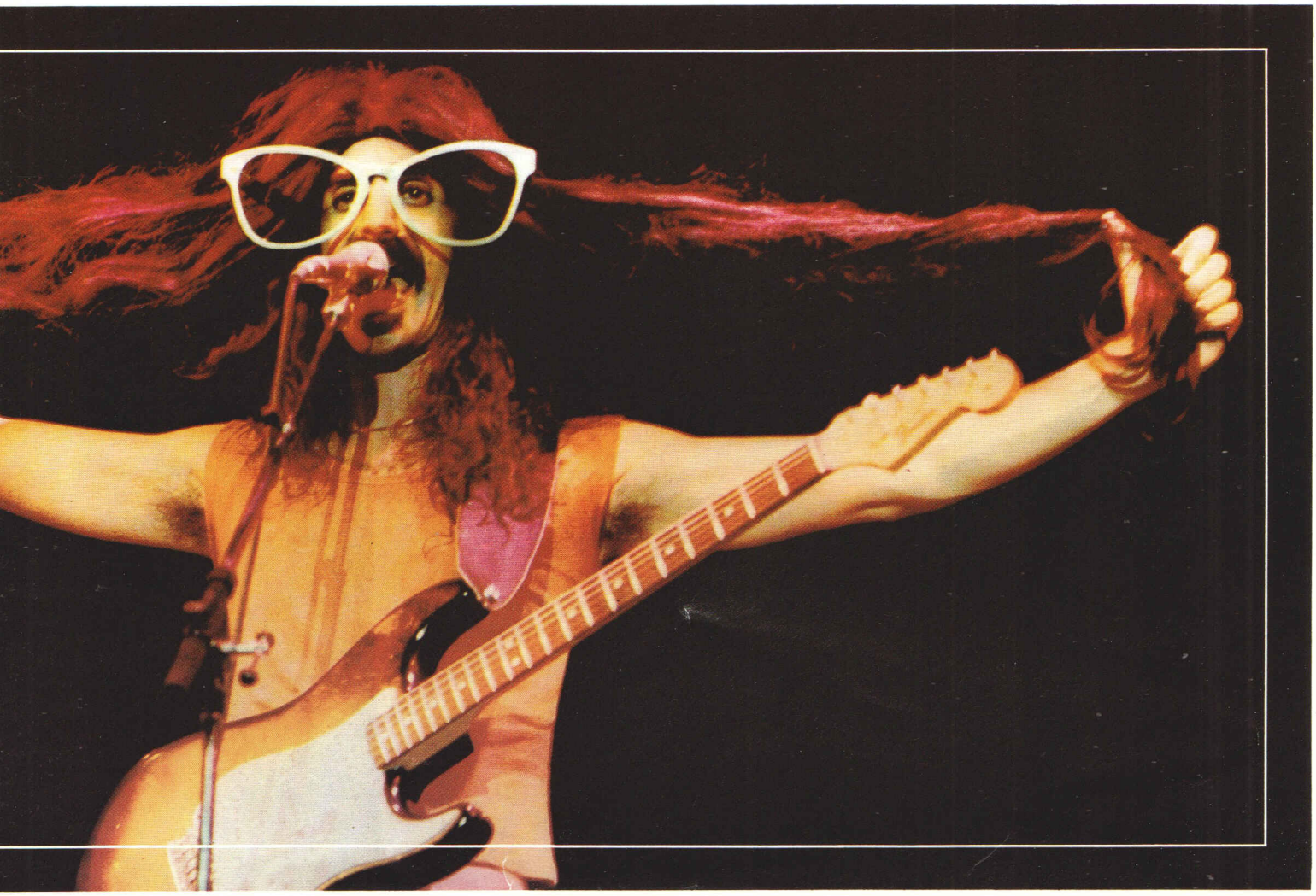
Iggy Pop goose-steps into the spotlight. In 1969, the music of Iggy and the Stooges was described as 'a reductio ad absurdum *of rock'n'roll' – a description with which the nihilistic singer never quibbled.*

As THE SIXTIES drew to a close, the prevailing trend of the musical mainstream was towards conservatism, compromise and complacency, with 'progressive' celebrations of technical virtuosity on the one hand and the soft self-analysis of the singer-songwriters on the other. Its reflection of the increasingly introspective mood of youth saw rock grow less challenging and more comfortable as the excitement, versatility and spirit of 1966 and 1967 descended into stagnation. Yet while the majority was content to soothe and flatter, there were still those whose music, whether by satire, cynicism, outrage or overt nihilism, represented confrontation.

The music and performance of artists like Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band, the MC5 and Iggy and the Stooges – along with the bleak visions of the Velvet Underground and the disturbing avant-garde work of such acts as the Godz and Autosalvage – would ensure that the ideals of social and cultural conflict essential to the spirit of rock'n'roll would survive the post-Woodstock malaise.

Revolt and rebellion

At a time when the average rock show was a static affair – electric guitarists standing in the spotlight, contorting their faces to fit their 'licks', or self-conscious solo artistes perched on stools, baring their souls – the live acts of these unorthodox American subversives offered *theatre*: from the flag-ripping of the MC5 to the flesh-slashing of Iggy Pop, from the bizarre costumes and twitching limbs of the Magic Band to US Marines bayonetting dolls with Frank Zappa. Although there was no common link between the sound of these various acts, they were united, nonetheless, by perversity and by their refusal to conform to the constraints of the new rock industry.



Above: Frank Zappa strikes a characteristically absurd pose. Through his parodies of the American way of life and his unmerciful lampoons of youth culture, Zappa showed himself to be the ultimate cynic of rock.

'The behaviour of rock stars, the mode of the music and the attitudes of many of its fans are unequivocally subversive,' wrote Richard Neville in *Playpower*, his 1970 book on underground culture, 'but the product is packaged and marketed by the establishment, at dizzy profits for all involved, and has failed to transform the world into a Battleship Potemkin.' Although the hippie idealism of San Francisco had been absorbed, diluted and re-promoted in less potent forms by the industry, the ever-increasing violence of cities such as New York and Detroit sparked off a rock sound that had more in common with personal revolt than cosmic rebellion.

In 1967, the streets of Detroit flared up in riots; the following year saw the MC5 record their first album, *Kick Out The Jams* – an LP of raw, uncompromising, modern rock'n'roll that captured the essence of the brutal urban sound. The politics of the MC5, based on the revolutionary philosophies of their manager John Sinclair, were naive to say the least. ('We are FREE; we are a bunch of arrogant motherfuckers and we don't give a damn for any cop or any kind of phony-ass authority control-addict creep who wants to put us down. We demand total freedom for everybody!' Sinclair was given to ranting.) But the aggression and energy of their untutored heavy metal gave no quarter; harsh and unrelenting, the MC5 were undoubtedly at odds with the mellowing mood of the times.

Those other uncontrollable sons of the Motor City, Iggy and the Stooges, lacked any sense of revolutionary values or political ideals – their sound, and Iggy's stage act, was founded on wild depravity, animal sexuality, unfettered nihilism and abuse of self and the audience. When Iggy slapped his own face with his silver lamé gloves he was slapping the crowd, demanding a reaction.

Reviewing the group's first album, *The Stooges*, in 1969, *Rolling Stone* critic Ed Ward described the music as 'a *reductio ad absurdum* of rock'n'roll that might have been thought up by a mad general in a wet dream.' Or as journalist Lester Bangs put it years later: 'The Stooges' music was brutal, mindless, primitive, vicious, base, savage, primal, hate-filled, grungy, terrifying and above all REAL.'

Frank speaking

While Detroit audiences were confronted by Iggy's three dumb chords, noise, sleaze, arrogance and self-mutilation, Los Angeles' Mothers of Invention elicited reactions with weird and garish montages of avant-garde complexity, savage humour, filth and rock 'n'roll parody. At the root of Frank Zappa's work was a love/hate relationship with all aspects of contemporary culture – sex, hypocrisy, money, war, power, ethnic minorities, religion and food – and an ill-disguised contempt for American youth.

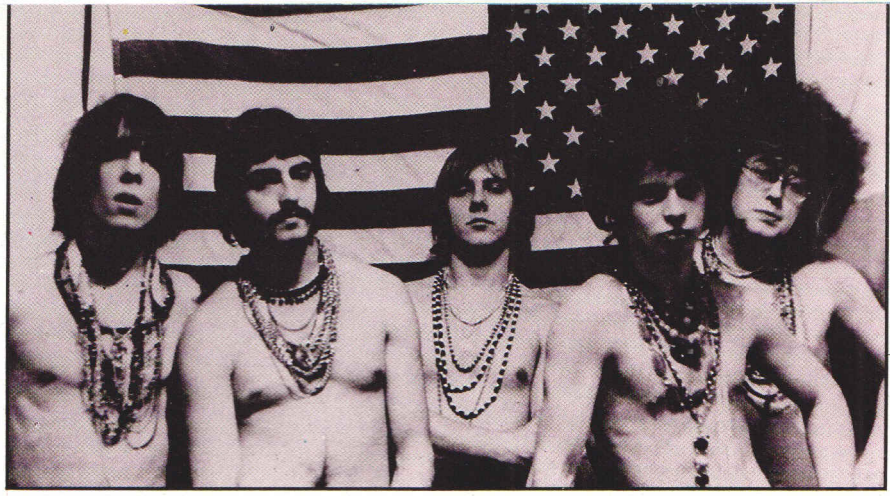
Zappa was, in many ways, rock's ultimate

cynic and nihilist. 'The whole hippie scene is wishful thinking,' he said in 1968. 'They wish they could love but they're full of shit. It's easier to make someone mad than to make somebody love.' So whereas, according to Zappa, the rest of the music scene was 'promoting a love relationship between the audience and the group – the group is supposed to love the audience to death', the Mothers of Invention went out of their way to exhibit disdain, deride their audience, confuse them and often alienate them altogether. 'Hello pigs!' Zappa would snarl in greeting as he took the stage.

The group's music was never relaxing and could be downright anarchic. 'Half the time when we're really doing something, the audience doesn't know what it is,' commented Zappa in 1968. 'Last week we were playing in Philadelphia and we got seven requests so we played them all at the same time. The audience couldn't even tell the songs apart.'

Out come the freaks

The music of Zappa protégé Captain Beefheart, meanwhile, was equally bizarre and inaccessible. But whereas Zappa plundered jazz, teen doo-wop and avant-garde classical forms to create his jaded anti-American commercials, Beefheart was more original and less cynical. The complexity of his music and the scintillating instrumental interplay of his Magic Band combined with his surrealistic wit to provide bizarre visions of life that were passionate and inspired. And yet, given the bland temper of the times, there were few who took Beefheart seriously. Fewer still could come to terms with the demands of his music; even Frank Zappa – much to the Captain's disgust – took to promoting him as a gruffer version of Tiny Tim.



In the end, these late-Sixties US subversives were operating in a vacuum; none were to be rewarded with much commercial success and none were able to affect rock's trend towards respectability. Looking back on the era in 1977, albeit with the benefit of hindsight and a surfeit of scathing contumely, Lester Bangs summed up their contributions thus: 'It was obvious that the fun was beginning to go out of the rock scene as early as 1968 and by 1971 it had fallen completely apart, leaving us with James Taylor, the all-time simpy narcissistic snotrich phony-angst introspective idiot.'

But despite the sterilisation of rock, the spirit of Iggy Pop, the MC5, Zappa *et al* would not be forgotten. It was their sound and attitudes that would pave the way for the mid-Seventies outrage and shock tactics of such acts as Alice Cooper and the New York Dolls. And when the Sex Pistols sparked off the British punk movement in 1976, it was the US subversives of the late Sixties that would provide much of the inspiration.

TOM HIBBERT

Above: The MC5 – radical hippies before their national flag. On stage, the group would tear the Stars and Stripes to pieces in anti-establishment defiance. Below: Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band enjoy their own version of a beach party.

UNCONDITIONALLY GUARANTEED

Captain Beefheart: desert songs and magic music

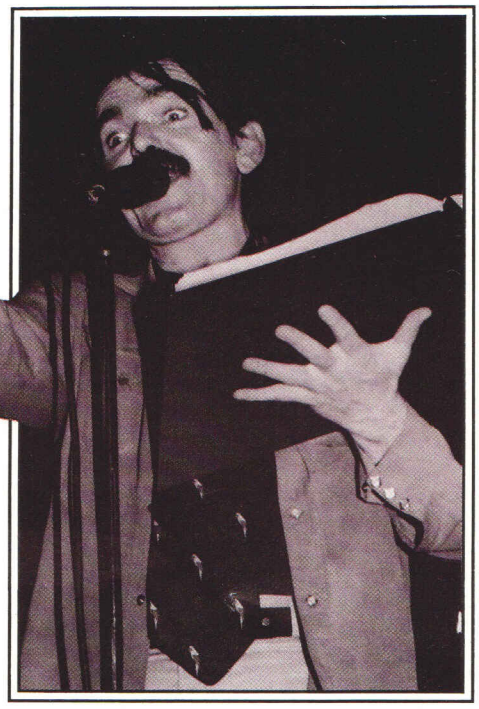
IF SUCCESS in the music business were measured in creativity rather than the ability to please the greatest number of people the most amount of time, then Captain Beefheart would be a rich man indeed. Beefheart's tortuous career in 'showbiz' says as much about the business as it does about the man himself: from his first recordings with the Magic Band in 1965, it was clear that the Captain would not stay happily tethered in any pre-defined corner of the market-place.

Captain Beefheart was born Don Van Vliet in Glendale, California, on 15 January 1941. In this sparsely inhabited locale, referred to on his first album as 'The Desert', Don shared his early years with the blue jay, the jack-rabbit, the coyote and high-school friend Frank Zappa. It was while relaxing in an abandoned car, somewhere in the desert, that Don and Frank decided to make a film together, called *Captain Beefheart Meets The Grunt People*. The film never materialised, but the young Van Vliet adopted the hero's name and became Captain Beefheart.

Milk and Kandy

Early in 1964, after a brief spell singing with a local combo named the Blackouts with Zappa, Beefheart formed the first incarnation of his own Magic Band featuring Alex St Claire and Ry Cooder on guitars, Jerry Handley on bass and Drumbo (real name John French) on drums. Later that year, the group signed to A&M Records and released two flop singles, 'Diddy Wah Diddy' – a cover of the Bo Diddley song – and 'Who Do You Think You're Fooling'. They also recorded an album, but when A&M heard the finished results, they refused to release it – Beefheart's lyrics were, the company thought, just too unconventional for the commercial market. Undaunted, Beefheart took the work to the less staid offices of Kama Sutra, and in 1966 *Safe As Milk* was granted a release on the Buddah label.

Although all the songs on *Safe As Milk* were Beefheart originals, they owed more to Howlin' Wolf and Chicago blues than anything else. Yet despite being steeped in the blues, like so many other songs of the era, there was nothing else orthodox about the music – the Magic Band's sound was unique. The two guitarists played complementary parts – there was no 'lead' or 'rhythm' as such – weaving a jabbing yet crystalline backcloth over which the Captain sang his bizarre, surrealistic lyrics with his splintering bass growl.



Above: The gospel according to Don Van Vliet. Opposite: Hats off to Beefheart.

Produced by Bob Kresnow and Richard Perry, *Safe As Milk* was largely ignored in the US. For while Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead *et al* were lionised by American consumer hippies, Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band, it seemed, were just too undiluted for the mass-market imagination even in those acid-drenched times. In the UK, however, it was a different story. The LP became an instant 'underground' classic, and Beefheart further enhanced his cult status with devastatingly loud and energetic gigs at London's Middle Earth and Speakeasy clubs in early 1968.

By then, Beefheart's songs were getting longer; the music was just as powerful as before but it was less blues-oriented, more meandering and complex, while the lyrics were funnier and more impressionistic. Ry Cooder had been replaced by Jeff Cotton, who played straggly, wandering guitar, wore a dress and a bowler hat and frequently sat in the bushes making bird noises. Somewhat unsurprisingly, Beefheart and his Magic Band had been filed under 'weird' by the music industry and when a second album, *Strictly Personal*, emerged in the spring of 1968, the Captain discovered, to his disgust, that producer Bob Krasnow had treated the material with extensive phasing to make the music more obviously 'far out'.

Beefheart virtually disowned the album: 'It was butchered while we were in England,' he commented at the time. 'The music was done honestly and shines through like a diamond in the mud.' The album's closing track, 'Kandy Korn', at least, remains a masterpiece. The guitars, chiming yet distorted, hang delicately over a winding abyss of bass and drums that never repeats itself throughout the piece. The band chant 'Be reborn' toward the final, exultant coda and the mood at the end is one of exorcism. 'I ain't blue no more!' testifies Beefheart when it's all over.

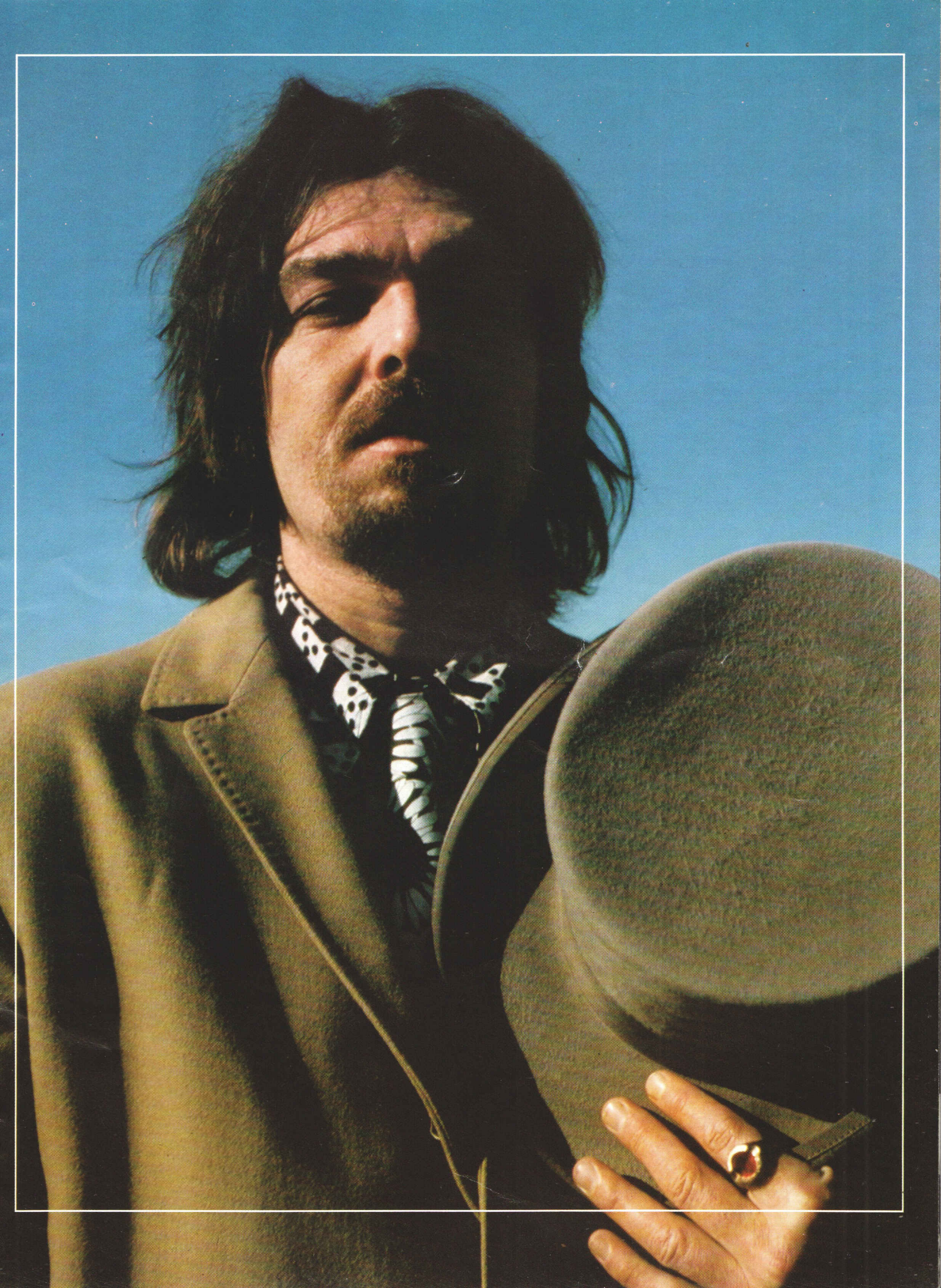
Blimp in the spotlight

In mid 1968, the Captain signed with Frank Zappa's Straight label and departed to the desert to prepare a new album. The results were released the following year as *Trout Mask Replica*, a double album of 28 songs all around the three minute mark and all unlike anything anyone had ever heard before. Throughout the LP Beefheart delivered his strange, compelling lyrics over backing tracks where just enough notes were fitted together to convince the listener that the band weren't making it up as they went along.

The dense, abrasive and undiluted songs included a vivid portrayal of atrocity on 'Dachau Blues' – 'Dancing and screaming and dying in the ovens/Coughing smoke and dying by the dozens/Down in Dachau Blues' – and other lurid, disjointed rants against the ferocity of humans, including 'My Human Gets Me Blues', 'Ant Man Bee' and 'Steal Softly Thru Snow'. Meanwhile, a happier side of the Captain surfaced on numbers such as 'The Blimp', a ludicrous falsetto monologue about an old airship covered in nipples, breathlessly intoned over a typewriter bass and yawning sax.

The primal, unearthly quality of *Trout Mask Replica* had been enhanced by the addition, on bass and guitar respectively, of Rockette Morton (real name Mark Boston) and Zoot Horn Rollo (Bill Harkelroad). Jeff Cotton had metamorphosed into Antennae Jimmy Semens and Beefheart's cousin, the Mascara Snake, had been enrolled on bass clarinet. None of the newcomers were experienced musicians, and the band had spent a year in the desert learning to play the *Trout Mask* songs – and, reportedly, living on acid and radishes.

By 1970, however, the band's line-up had changed again. Ed Marimba, who as Artie Tripp had been with Zappa's Mothers of Invention, had joined to add percussion while Antennae Jimmy had quit following a fight during which he had broken Rockette's dentures. As a result, the new album, *Lick My Decals Off Baby*, was recorded with only one guitarist; and yet, with its flurrying saxes and tropical marimba runs, the LP proved to be even more of a musical jungle than *Trout Mask Replica*. But, coming so soon after the staggering innovation of its predecessor, the record broke no new ground.



Soon after the 1970 release of *Lick My Decals Off Baby*, producer Frank Zappa and the Captain fell out with one another. After criticising Zappa for promoting him as a freakshow – though, in all fairness, how else could the silent majority have been introduced to his extraordinary sound? – Beefheart signed to Warner/Reprise, recruited a second guitarist in Winged Eel Fingerling (Elliott Ingber) and began work on a fifth album. *The Spotlight Kid* was released in late 1971 and, whether under pressure to reach a bigger audience or simply to cut corners and have a good time, Beefheart came up with his most accessible record since *Safe As Milk*.

The songs were basically one riff played throughout, but created by the interrelation of all the instruments rather than – as in most 'heavy' bands – by unison guitars and bass. Similarly the rhythms, though repetitive, were far from the Grand Funk/Led Zeppelin thrash that was popular at the time: the Magic Band played a mixture of blues, funk and voodoo that was unique, but just as danceable, and louder than the rest of them.

Live, the group were staggeringly powerful. Rockette Morton would come writhing onto the stage, with an electric toaster on his head, and strum his bass viciously until Zoot Horn Rollo, thin and wispy in a Chinaman's hat, plugged in on the other side and produced a sound that fitted with Rockette's seemingly random attack. When all the other musicians were on stage, the Captain – resplendent in a black and gold cape – would stride imperiously to the microphone and boom 'I'm gonna booglarize you, baby!' into the already groaning PA. The whole band jived relentlessly throughout the set, Beefheart chased Rockette Morton around like an escaped turkey and the assembled musicians reproduced their leader's compositions – new and old – note for note. What had sounded too cranky for many people on record made perfect sense live.

In 1972, the ranks of the Magic Band shifted yet again; Fingerling quit, Morton transferred to guitar and Orejon (Roy Estrada, another ex-Mother) took over on bass. On *Clear Spot*, produced by Ted Templeman and released later that year, the rhythm section veered towards syncopated, loping funk, the guitars became more elaborate and the occasional use of horns and female backing vocals added an element of soul music. Many of the songs were celebrations of sexual love and, from the rousing 'Nowadays A Woman's Gotta Hit A Man' to the exquisite 'Her Eyes Are A Blue Million Miles', Beefheart made love songs seem more alive than they had in years. If there was any point in his career when Beefheart could have crossed over into the million-selling bracket, this was it. A world tour in 1973 was a sellout and Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band seemed only inches away from mass acceptance. But in 1974 disaster struck.

The list of Beefheart's record companies and musicians is a long one; likewise his advisers and managers. Though a domineering character on stage, he was easily influenced when it came to business matters. Thus it was that Andy Di Martino, who had recently become involved with the Beefheart entourage, persuaded him to record *Unconditionally Guaranteed*, an album of short poppy songs written by the Captain, his wife Janet and Di Martino himself. The cover shot of Beefheart clutching two fistfuls of dollars summed up the intention of the record, but the reality was too half-hearted and laid-back to make it a commercial success. Although some of the tracks, like 'Peaches' and 'Upon The My-O-My' were likeable enough, the Magic Band was wasted on such lightweight material. On the eve of Beefheart's third British tour in 1974, his Magic Band all quit, leaving him to stumble through the dates backed by a very average band called Buckwheat that was dredged up at the last moment.

Divided we fall . . .

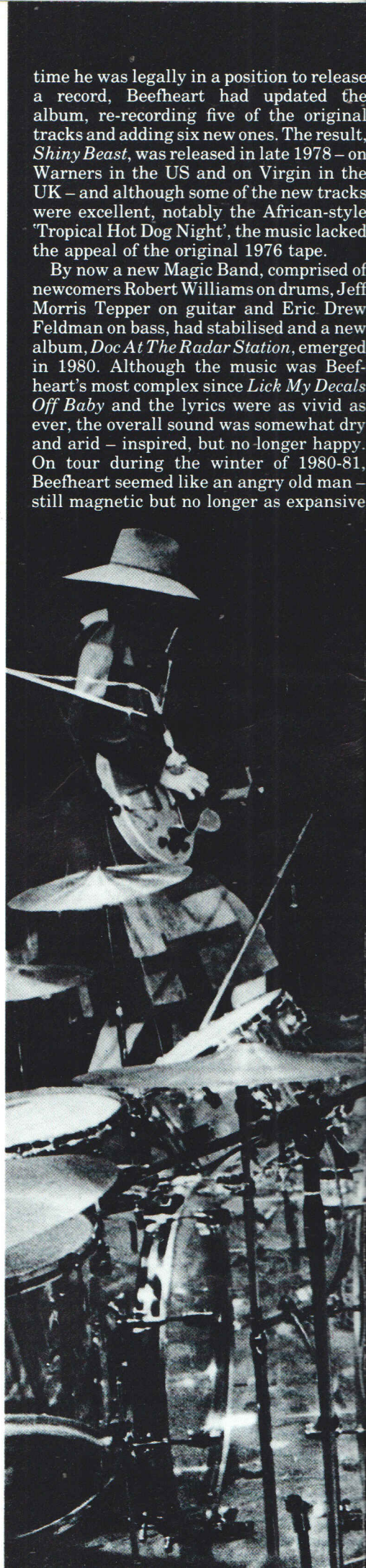
Although Beefheart claimed that he composed and arranged all his music, the departing Magic Band complained at Beefheart taking all the credit when they themselves had contributed a fair amount. And it was undeniable that without a *bona fide* Magic Band, the Captain's stage show was half what it had been. On the other hand, when Harkelroad, Boston and Tripp (now shorn of their exotic stage names) formed a band called Mallard in 1975, they couldn't come up with anything very original either.

Meanwhile the Captain was still under the influence of Di Martino, and mortgaged what remained of his credibility to make *Bluejeans And Moonbeams*, a collection of pleasant and thoroughly disposable numbers, with a bunch of session men in late 1974. Beefheart now seemed to be leaning over backwards to become someone else – a faceless artist for a faceless public. The creative spark appeared to have died. 1975 saw a drunken Beefheart humiliating himself by singing Frank Zappa's lyrics in Zappa's band, although he was allowed to recite one or two of his own poems during the intervals. But 1976 saw a miraculous return to form with a new LP, *Bat Chain Puller*.

After a year's inactivity, Beefheart had amassed a collection of new songs that reflected the many styles he had pioneered over the previous 10 years. From the title track – the metronomic tale of some enormous phallic slug oozing through the desert, decked with coloured lights – to the ominous parable of social collapse, 'The Thousand And Tenth Day Of The Human Totem Pole' with its *Trout Mask*-like guitars and stumbling rhythm section, the music was a conscious return to classic Magic Band style.

Because of typically convoluted managerial problems, however – Beefheart's contract was disputed between Virgin, Warners and Mercury – *Bat Chain Puller* could not be released. And by the time he was legally in a position to release a record, Beefheart had updated the album, re-recording five of the original tracks and adding six new ones. The result, *Shiny Beast*, was released in late 1978 – on Warners in the US and on Virgin in the UK – and although some of the new tracks were excellent, notably the African-style 'Tropical Hot Dog Night', the music lacked the appeal of the original 1976 tape.

By now a new Magic Band, comprised of newcomers Robert Williams on drums, Jeff Morris Tepper on guitar and Eric Drew Feldman on bass, had stabilised and a new album, *Doc At The Radar Station*, emerged in 1980. Although the music was Beefheart's most complex since *Lick My Decals Off Baby* and the lyrics were as vivid as ever, the overall sound was somewhat dry and arid – inspired, but no longer happy. On tour during the winter of 1980-81, Beefheart seemed like an angry old man – still magnetic but no longer as expansive

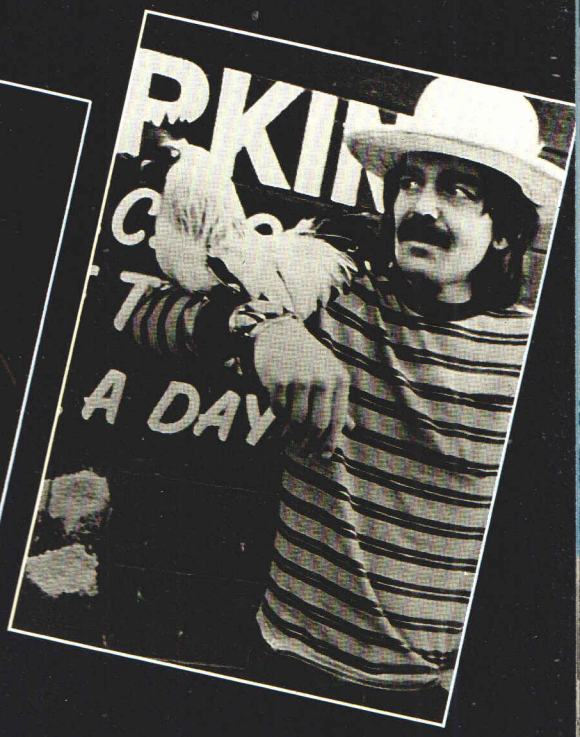


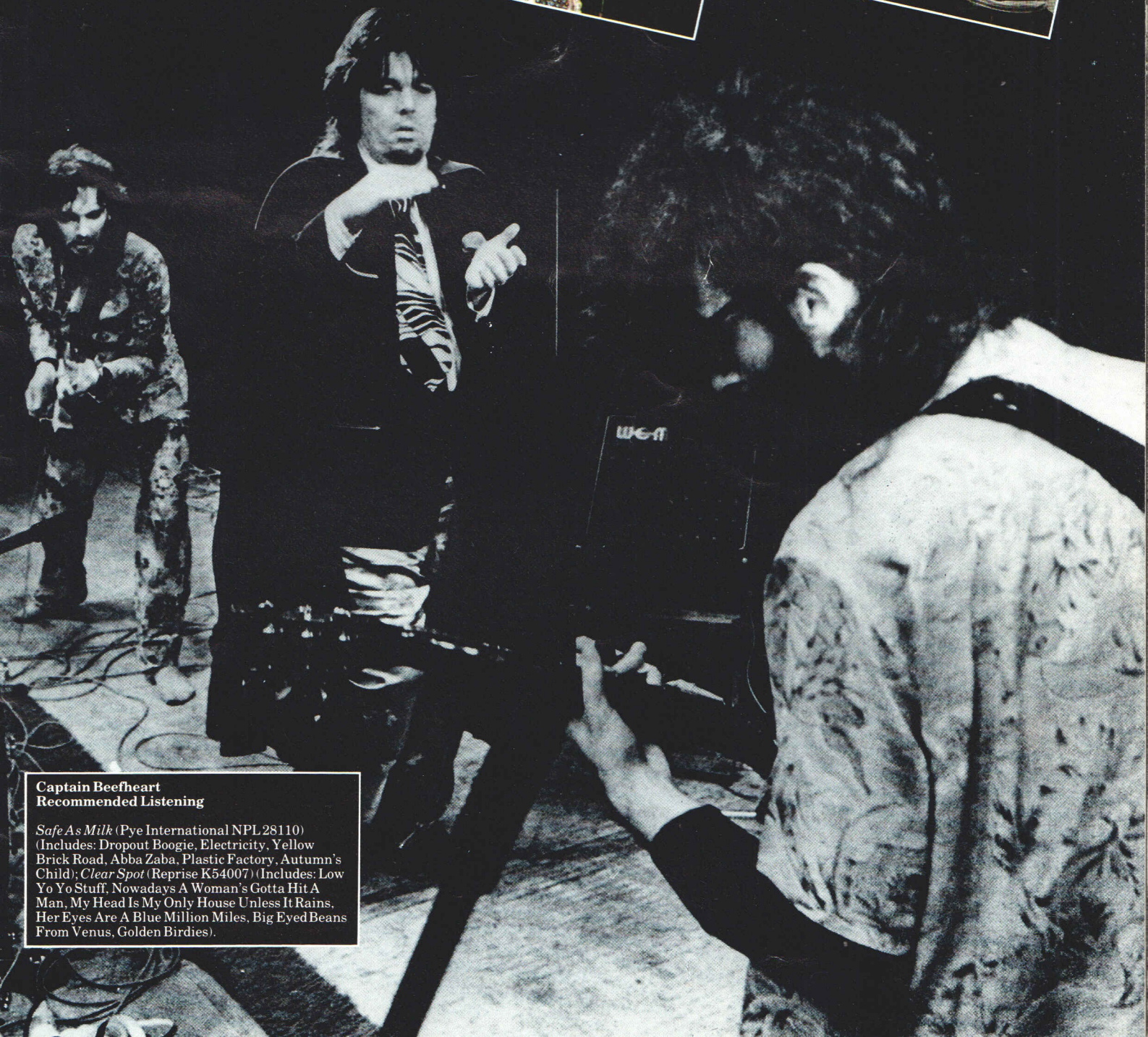
as the cloaked supremo of yore. And it was strange to watch him on stage with musicians who looked young enough to be his children playing the licks popularised a decade earlier.

The 1982 album, *Ice Cream For Crow*, showed that Captain Beefheart still had much to offer, however. Although his music was no longer innovative, it still contained an irrepressible wit, bite and imagination. While so many of his contemporaries were either dead or raddled parodies of their younger selves, Captain Beefheart was slicing into the Eighties with defiance and a continuing determination to confront insanity with insanity.

LUTHER PAISLEY

Whether in tearful mood (right), giving his detractors the bird (far right) or in his element on stage (below), Captain Beefheart could always be relied upon to entertain.





Captain Beefheart
Recommended Listening

Safe As Milk (Pye International NPL 28110) (Includes: Dropout Boogie, Electricity, Yellow Brick Road, Abba Zaba, Plastic Factory, Autumn's Child); *Clear Spot* (Reprise K54007) (Includes: Low Yo Yo Stuff, Nowadays A Woman's Gotta Hit A Man, My Head Is My Only House Unless It Rains, Her Eyes Are A Blue Million Miles, Big Eyed Beans From Venus, Golden Birdies).

MC5

Kicking out the jams with the Motor City rebels

'IF YOU TAKE EVERYTHING in the universe and break it down to a common denominator, all you've got is energy,' said the MC5's Wayne Kramer in 1969. 'It's the level we communicate from – that's the essence of the urban sound.' In the late Sixties, when much American music was mellowing, the MC5 peddled uncompromising, high-energy rock. Blended with radical hippie politics and naive idealism, it echoed the street tension of their native Detroit. But although the group's frantic stage shows – hectic heavy metal and rabble-rousing anarchy – won support from proto-punks and the counter-culture, they were just too unrelenting to be accepted by the Woodstock generation as a whole.

The Motor City Five, as they were originally known, were formed in Detroit in 1966 by Rob Tyner (vocals), Michael Davis (bass), Dennis Thompson (drums) and guitarists Wayne Kramer and Fred 'Sonic' Smith. Initially an R&B/soul outfit playing around the clubs of Detroit and Ann Arbor, the group soon acquired a reputation for showing up at gigs drunk, late or not at all, playing too loud and being sick on Beatles albums. By the summer of 1967, the band had released one unsuccessful single, 'One Of The Guys', on the local AMG label and had been banned from all but the sleaziest local venues. Then, after a rare appearance at Northville's Cavern (where the Motor City Five lost to the Unrelated Segments in a 'Battle Of The Bands' contest), the group were approached by John Sinclair, who offered to manage them.

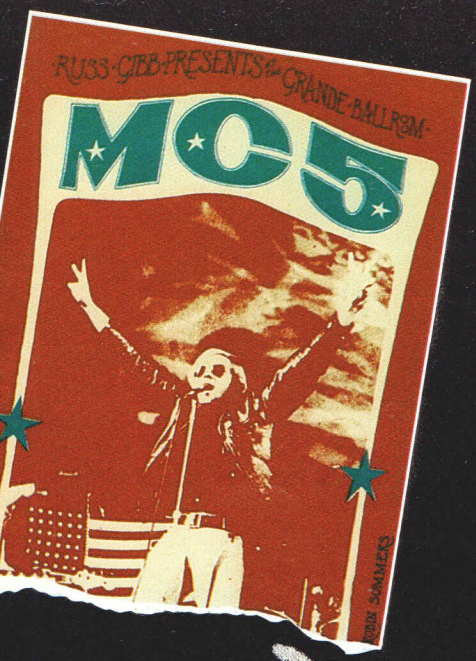
Despite his lack of managerial experience, Sinclair set to work acquiring new equipment and soon the MC5 were playing regularly at Detroit's Grande Ballroom for 125 dollars a night. But Sinclair wasn't merely a rock fan – he was also 'Minister of Information' for the radical hippie White Panther party. Under Sinclair's guidance, the MC5 began to move away from R&B/soul towards high-volume rock'n'roll with a strong anti-establishment accent.

In October 1967, the MC5 released a second single, 'Looking At You', on the local A-Square label. The record captured the group's raw, frenetic style perfectly

'The MC5 is totally committed to the revolution. With our music and our economic genius we plunder the unsuspecting straight world for money and the means to carry out our program and revolutionise its children at the same time . . . We are LSD-driven total maniacs in the universe . . . We are bad . . . We will not be fucked with . . . We will use guns if we have to – we will do anything if we have to.'

John Sinclair, 1969

Below: The MC5's guitarists Fred 'Sonic' Smith (left) and Wayne Kramer address an audience with the White Panthers' salute. Inset: Peace-sign propaganda on a 1969 gig poster.



and began to pick up airplay on Detroit's 'underground' radio station WABX.

On 7 June 1968, the MC5 supported Cream at the Grande Ballroom. They turned in a devastating set that, claimed Sinclair, 'destroyed Cream so totally that Cream didn't even know it'. As the MC5 reached the feedback-growling climax of 'Black To Comm', Tyner ripped an American flag to pieces, provoking an orgy of cheers. 'People were rolling around, moaning in ecstasy on the floor,' Sinclair recalled. 'It was the most intense moment in the history of rock and roll.'

Kick Out The Jams, recorded at the Grande in October 1968 and released the following year on Elektra, showed that Sinclair's enthusiasm for MC5 live was not completely misplaced. From the berserk treatment of the standard 'Ramblin' Rose' to Fred Smith's stampeding interpretation of Detroit's 1967 riots, 'Motor City Is Burning', the power of the rhythm section combined with the twin-guitar attack and Tyner's exultant, clawing vocals to create a sound of unparalleled force.

By the time the album was released, the MC5 were already notorious. In March 1969, the underground paper *Berkeley Barb* had been prosecuted for publishing a photograph of group members committing indecent acts with a female member of the White Panthers. The album caused further outrage with its opening shout: 'Kick out the jams, motherfuckers!' A Detroit record store refused to stock the album and the group retaliated by covering the shop front with obscene stickers. Elektra's response was to drop the MC5 and alter the offending lines to 'Kick out the jams, brothers and sisters' on all subsequent copies of the LP they released.

Back in the USA

Late in 1969, Sinclair was arrested for possession of two marijuana cigarettes and put on trial in Ann Arbor. Despite Michigan's liberal drug laws, Judge Colombo sentenced Sinclair – 'a person,' he proclaimed, 'who has deliberately flaunted and scoffed at the law' – to 10 years' imprisonment. Sinclair's 'revolution' would be suppressed behind bars. The stance of the White Panthers, which had seemed credible in 1967 and 1968, seemed unrealistic and self-defeating by 1969. The MC5, now signed to Atlantic, began to replace their old political anthems with songs that dealt with the problems of a new teenage generation.

Back In The USA (1970), produced by rock critic Jon Landau, was crammed with three-minute gems such as 'High School', 'American Ruse' and 'Teenage Lust' on which the uncontrolled hysteria of old made way for a more refined fervour, with twin guitars and racing rhythm section working overtime. To old MC5 fans, however, the album seemed like a compromise, while it attracted few new devotees. The 1971 album *High Time* saw the band's previous drive and conviction diluted by the addition of mass brass, and in 1972, following a disastrous European tour, the MC5 disbanded. Rob Tyner made various attempts to front a new MC5 line up, Fred 'Sonic' Smith drifted off to the bland hard rock of his own Sonics Rendezvous, Michael Davis languished in prison following a drugs arrest and Wayne Kramer followed him after attempting to sell cocaine to a policewoman in 1976.

The punk boom of the late Seventies, however, was to bring a belated recognition for the style, verve and energy of the MC5; while the recordings of the long-defunct group were re-released, the hectic frenzy of their early stage shows was emulated by countless acts. In a letter from prison in the early Seventies, John Sinclair had described the atmosphere of an early MC5 performance. His words might have been equally applicable to any number of punk groups playing in London in 1976-77: 'It was a beautiful demonstration of the principles of high-energy performance: as the performer puts out more, the energy level of the audience is raised – and they give back more energy to the performers until everything is TOTALLY FRENZIED.'

TOM HIBBERT

MC5
Recommended Listening

Kick Out The Jams (Elektra K42027) (Includes: Kick Out The Jams, Ramblin' Rose, Borderline, Motor City Is Burning, I Want You Right Now, Rocket Reducer No. 62 (Rama Lama Fa Fa Fa)); *Back In The USA* (Atlantic K50346) (Includes: High School, Back In The USA, American Ruse, Call Me Animal, Teenage Lust).

ZAPPA

Surreal anarchy from the Mother superior

FRANK ZAPPA was born a composer. Had he been born in a different time or place, he would probably have become a 'serious' composer. But fortunately for rock music he grew up in the teen culture of California listening to Fifties doowop and R&B, and these were the styles that would permeate his compositions. From his early work onwards, Zappa evolved for himself an enormously flexible musical language that could encompass everything from atonal orchestral passages to humorous dialogue, and he developed a unique musical format that required highly trained musicians who could sight-read and respond to hand signals. This in turn made the ever-changing Zappa band one of the great rock 'n'roll training grounds (comparable to the big bands before the war), while a theatrical veneer to his shows enabled him to present material that might normally have been too complex for a rock audience.

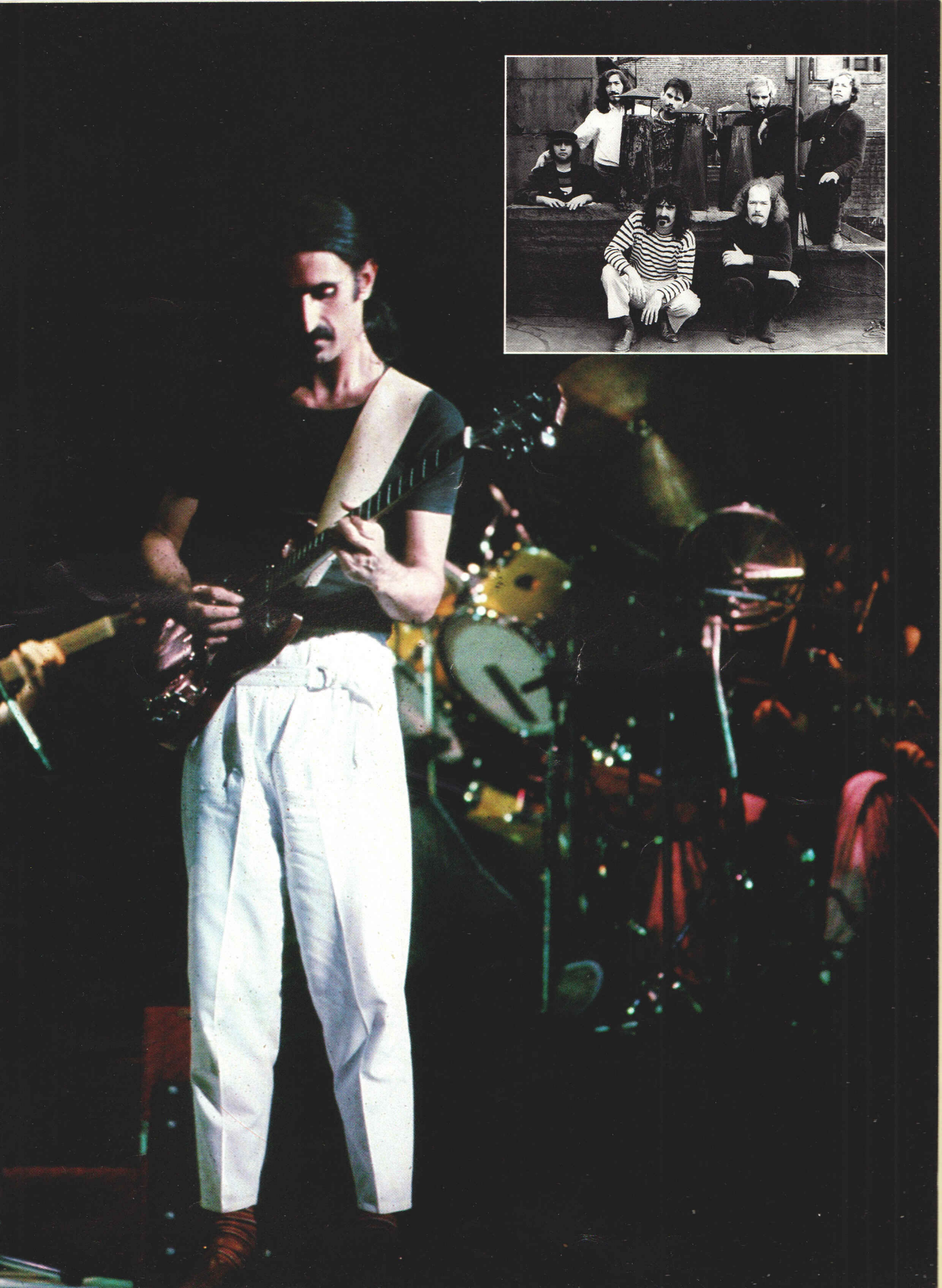
As one of the first to attempt to merge pop, rock, jazz and classical music, Zappa has, arguably, extended the boundaries of rock'n'roll more than any other performer. If anything has prevented his work being accorded its due place, then it must be its sheer magnitude: few, if any, rock artists have been so prolific or sustained such creative energy over such a timespan.

On 21 December 1940, a Sicilian-Greek couple in Baltimore, Maryland, had their first child. They called him Frank (not Francis) Zappa after his father and followed him with Bob, Carl and Candy. When Frank was nine, the family moved to Monterey, California, and three years later to Pomona, a suburb of Los Angeles. Frank senior worked in the missile industry, first for Convair, then for Lockheed, and this meant constantly moving home: from LA to San Diego, then to Lancaster, California, a small town in the Mojave Desert.

Zappa's teenage years were spent listening to the radio – the sounds of the Penguins, Johnny Otis, the Teen Queens, the Shields, the Rays, the Clovers and all the many other doowop and R&B groups – at a time when status at high school depended on wearing the right sort of shoes and sex was something you did in cars. Constant moving had made Frank a bit of a loner with no close friends so he was pleased to meet and befriend Don Van Vliet, later Captain Beefheart, at the Antelope Valley High School. They used to sit up all night listening to records and have to skip school the next day in order to sleep.

In 1956 Zappa formed a school combo called the Blackouts, an eight-piece in which he played guitar. By then he had

Above left: Portrait of the artist . . . Inset above right: The Mothers of Invention. From left, background: Billy Mundi, Jimmy Carl Black, Roy Estrada, Buck Gardner, Don Preston. Foreground: Zappa and Ray Collins. Right: Bandleader Zappa plays lead guitar.



already discovered modern 'classical' music, particularly Edgard Varèse and Igor Stravinsky; he played Varèse's *Ionization* over and over till Rosemarie, his mother, banned it from the living room. On his fifteenth birthday he spent the money he was given as a present on a telephone call to Varèse in New York City. Between the ages of 14 and 18 he wrote a huge amount of music, most of which he was never to hear performed since it required an orchestra.

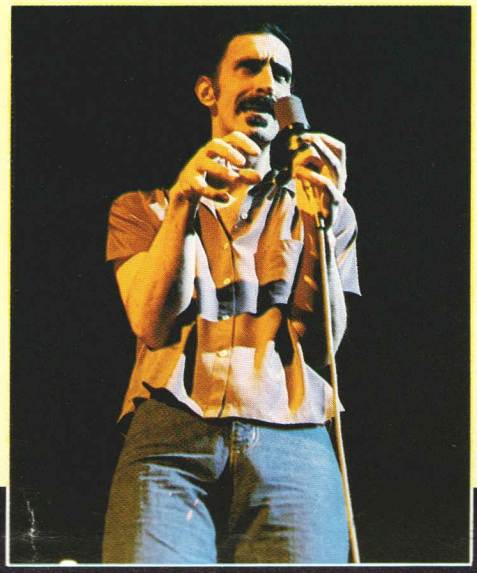
The world's greatest sinner

Early in 1959 Frank Zappa senior was on the move again. This time Frank did not accompany his parents. Instead, he took an apartment in the Echo Park section of Los Angeles, a bohemian area near the Hollywood Freeway, and wrote the score for a low-budget Western movie, *Run Home Slow*, which was scripted by his old English teacher. However, the movie folded during production when the lead actress miscarried on the second day of shooting, and Frank moved back to the suburbs.

In Alta Loma, out near the San Gabriel Mountains, Zappa enrolled in Chaffee Junior College where he studied harmony and married his first wife, Kay. He soon dropped out of school, however, and while Kay worked in a bank, Frank played cocktail music in bars for 20 dollars a night and worked as the art director of a greeting card company by day.

In 1960 he wrote the music for another B movie, *The World's Greatest Sinner*; using a 52-piece (mainly amateur) orchestra, he recorded it at Chaffee College, mixing it down to mono in a truck parked outside. It was Frank's first orchestral piece to be performed. He never got paid.

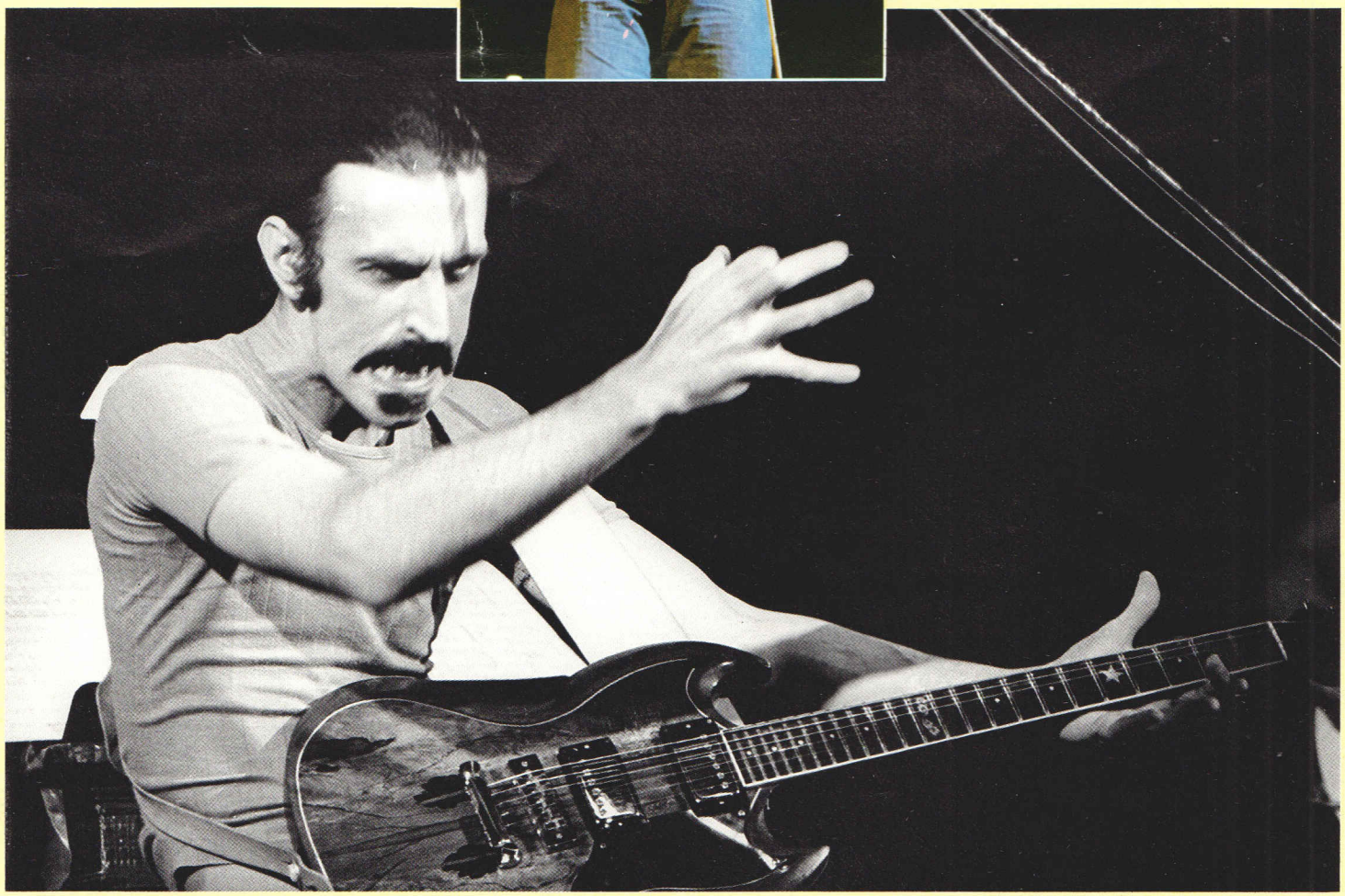
While Frank kept on writing, he and Kay struggled to survive until, in 1963, *Run Home Slow* went back into production. With his share of the advance money Frank bought his first real electric guitar and also acquired a home-made five-track recording studio in nearby Cucamonga. He changed its name to Studio Z and opened for business charging 13 dollars 50 cents an hour. He got few takers but certainly put all that free studio time to good use, recording hours of experimental music with Don Van Vliet. By 1964, Zappa had split up with Kay and was living in the studio with his friend Jim 'Motorhead' Sherwood and two girls.



Memories of El Monte

San Bernardino County is notoriously conservative, and the goings-on at Studio Z did not go unnoticed. One day a used car salesman asked Frank if he could come up with a sex tape for a little party he was giving for the boys – something X-rated, Frank would know. Frank knew. He also knew that the 100-dollar fee would buy a lot of food and tape, so he and one of the girls bounced up and down on the squeaky bed, recorded a lot of sexy conversation, edited out all the laughing, recorded some accompanying movie music and mixed the whole lot together. The next day the man called for his tape. He showed them his badge. He was Detective Willis of the San Bernardino Vice Squad. Frank had been set up. He spent 10 days in jail, three years on probation and was exempted from the draft for being an ex-con. He bailed the girl out using advance royalties on 'Memories Of El Monte', a song that he and Ray Collins had written for the Penguins.

The many moods of Frank Zappa: at the microphone (left), with guitar (below), and raising an umbrella indoors, defying rumours of impending ill-fortune (opposite).



This unfortunate experience had wide-ranging effects on Frank's music, much of which became concerned with exposing this kind of sanctimonious and hypocritical attitude to sex and in trying to provoke authority in general. He began by including passages of heavy breathing on *Freak Out*, and followed it by a pumpkin having an orgasm on *Absolutely Free*. Zappa went on to explore every possible way of offending middle-class America: songs about anal sex, S&M, groupies, graphic descriptions of the shortcomings of virtually every racial and minority group – cops, hippies, groupies, Jews, Catholics, disco girls, politicians and, of course, the middle-class American family itself.

Freak city

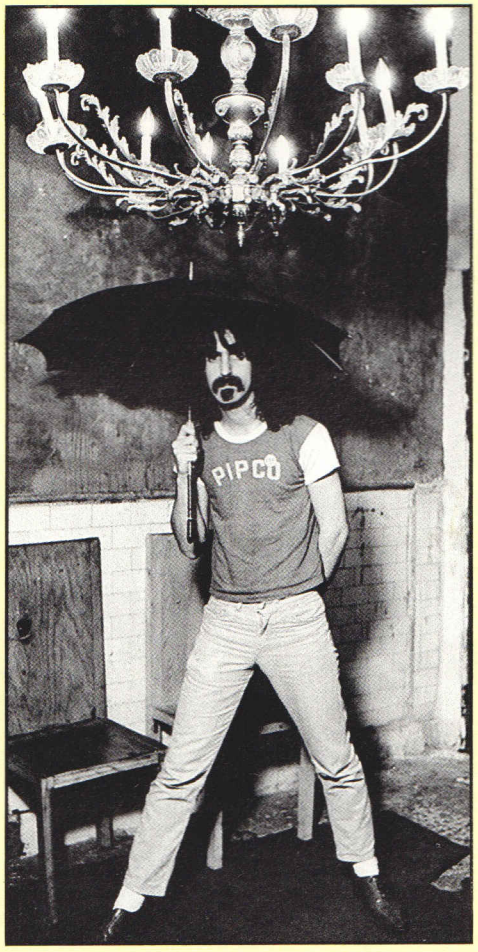
When he got out of jail, Zappa moved back to Los Angeles where he joined his friend, singer Ray Collins, in the Soul Giants, a band that also featured Roy Estrada on bass and Jimmy Carl Black on drums. The Soul Giants spent most of their time playing soul/R&B numbers like 'Shotgun' in local bars and getting drunk. By this time, Frank had become friendly with a lot of artists and Hollywood types on the burgeoning freak scene, in particular the crowd of people who hung around Vito, a sixty-year-old proto-hippy whose house was used as a 'crash pad' for a lot of young runaways and musicians and where there was always music and dancing and sex. Through these connections, Frank got the band a gig playing in a party scene in a 'sexploitation' movie called *Mondo Hollywood*. He also changed the name of the band to the Mothers.

One night when they were playing at a club on the Strip they were approached by one Herb Cohen with an offer of management. The offer was taken up and Cohen got the band a gig at the Action in Hollywood followed by a residency at the Whiskey where Bob Dylan's producer, Tom Wilson, saw them and signed them to the MGM/Verve label. Zappa needed Wilson's backing, as he wanted nothing less than to record a double album. No-one had ever issued a double album of popular music and certainly not as a debut album. Moreover, the album was conceived as a whole – a 'concept' – instead of as a series of singles.

Freak Out was not an album about love and teenage romance. It was about the real things that were happening to kids in LA at that time. As Zappa later recalled: 'About 50 per cent of the songs were concerned with the events of 1965 Los Angeles. At that time, in the kiddie community I was hanging out in, they were seeing God in colours and flaking out all over the place. Meanwhile there was all that racial tension building up in Watts.' The events of 1965 had included a massive crackdown on the kids on the Strip by the police who enforced a curfew with exceptional violence, leaving a trail of bleeding heads and shocked bystanders.

With *Freak Out*, which was recorded early in 1966 and released later that year, Frank virtually invented psychedelic rock. The mix of long rambling improvisations, lyrics that developed into riffs then faded away again, mumbling and fragments of conversation, overlapping vocals and solos, all held in place by a steady beat, was revolutionary stuff indeed.

Following the LP's release, the Mothers (or the less contentious Mothers of Invention, as the group had become at MGM's insistence) embarked on a second album, *Absolutely Free*, which was released in May 1967. This was a direct confrontation with middle America; on songs like 'Brown Shoes Don't Make It', 'Plastic People' and 'America Drinks And Goes Home', Zappa expressed all the loathing and disgust he had been forced to hide for all those years while playing in lounge-bar bands.



In November 1966, Zappa hired the Garrick Theatre in Greenwich Village, New York, on a block booking and did 14 shows a week for the next six months. The band – which by now included Collins, Black and Estrada with Don Preston (keyboards), Billy Mundi (drums) and Bunk Gardner and Motorhead on saxes – rapidly became a tight and proficient outfit as Frank taught them to respond to his hand signals so that they could change time signature, improvise or solo on command. He also began to develop the theatrical side of the Mothers, and it was at the Garrick Theatre that he persuaded some US Marines to come on stage and demonstrate – using rubber dolls – how to bayonet babies.

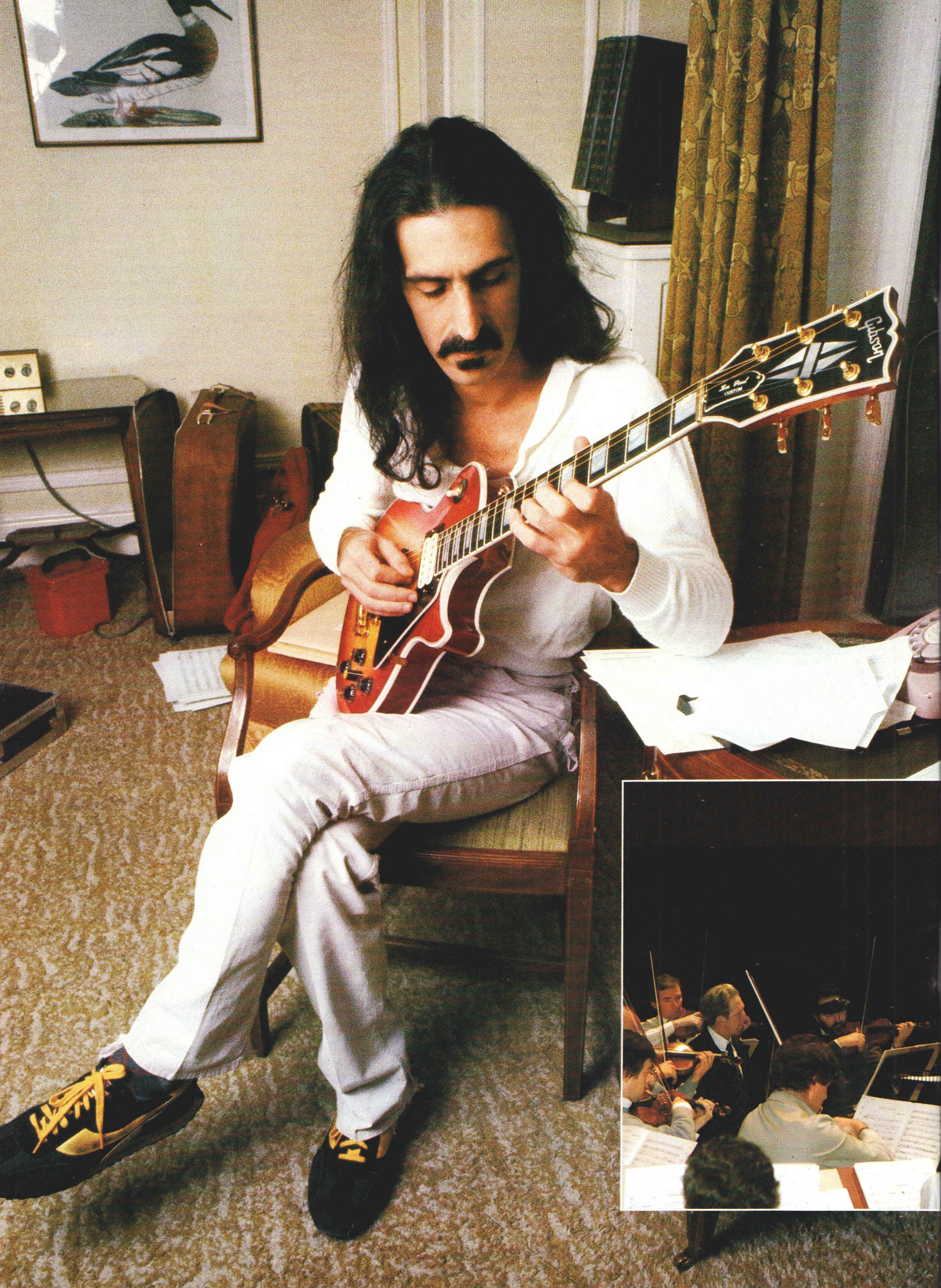
Back in LA in the spring of 1967, the Mothers cut *We're Only In It For The Money*, taking a break in the summer to make their first visit to London and play 'Louie Louie' on the grand organ of the Royal Albert Hall. *We're Only In It For The Money* continued in the same musical vein as the previous two albums, with montages, slowed-down/sped-up voices and tape cut-up techniques. This time, the targets of Zappa's savage, almost vicious wit were flower children, hippies, punks – in fact the very audience at which, presumably, the album was aimed. The cover was a lampoon on that of the Beatles' *Sgt Pepper*, featuring Zappa in pigtails and a little girl's dress, and the album's release was delayed when the Beatles' management fussed over the irreverent parody.

In October 1967, Zappa returned to New York and block-booked Apostolic Studios for the recording of his first solo album, a complex piece of composition called *Lumpy Gravy* which owed far more to Varèse and Stravinsky than to rock'n'roll. He followed this by working simultaneously on two separate Mothers' albums, *Cruisin' With Ruben And The Jets* and *Uncle Meat*. On *Cruisin'*, Zappa mixed the archetypal teen themes and anthems with carefully constructed banal lyrics to re-create the sound of Fifties doowop. So authentic were the results that the album actually charted in parts of the South where it received airplay and listeners took it for the genuine article. *Uncle Meat*, meanwhile, was music for a movie that was never finished. It was composed mostly in the studio and contained some of the most beautiful themes Zappa has ever written.

Permanent damage

In February 1968, Zappa returned to LA, married again (to Gail Sloatman) and settled into the Log Cabin, once the ranch home of silent cowboy actor Tom Mix. Here Frank set about recording *Burnt Weenie Sandwich* (released in 1970) which contained further serious musical explorations, this time sandwiched between two doowop 'classics' in 'Valarie' and 'WPLJ'. Not counting 1970's *Weasels Ripped My Flesh* (a retrospective set assembled from studio out-takes and live tracks cut between 1967 and 1969), *Burnt Weenie* was the last album by the original Mothers Of Invention. For although Frank had by now attracted a sizeable cult following – particularly in Europe – he was by no means a superstar and could not afford to keep such a large group on the road any more.

Having parted company with both the Mothers and MGM, Zappa now concentrated his efforts on two record labels that he had set up with manager Herb Cohen, Bizarre and Straight. All Zappa and Mothers product, from *Uncle Meat* to the 1972 LP *The Grand Wazoo* emerged on Bizarre in the US, while the two labels also provided an outlet for some of the West Coast's more erratic talents. Zappa played guitar on Jeff Simmons' *Lucille Has*


Gibson

Messed Up My Mind (1969) and on the GTOs' *Permanent Damage* (1969), which he also produced. He recorded Wild Man Fischer, an eccentric who had hitherto sung songs for dimes on the streets of Hollywood, and edited and issued albums by such great spoken-word artists as Lenny Bruce and Lord 'The Nazz' Buckley.

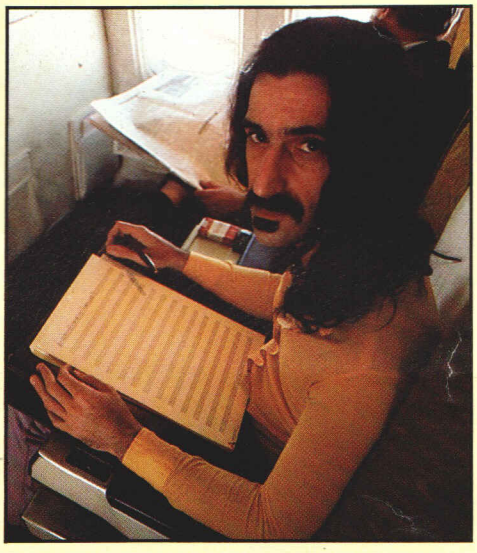
These releases showed Zappa's continuing interest in LA street culture, both teen and underground. (This interest re-emerged in 1982 when he recorded a duet called 'Valley Girl' with his daughter Moon Unit, which parodied the language of the teenage girls of the San Fernando Valley.) But Zappa's greatest achievement during this period was the production of Captain Beefheart's classic *Trout Mask Replica* album.

Hot peaches

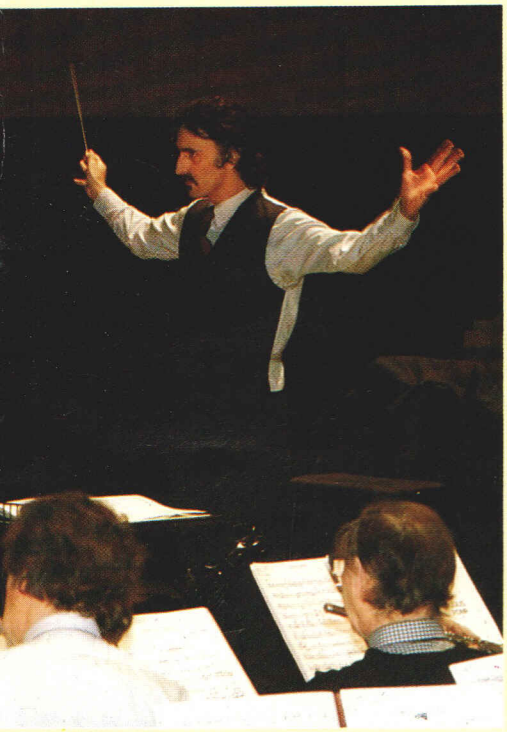
By now Frank had moved to the top of Laurel Canyon, and during August and September 1969 he worked on his second solo album with the help of a host of musicians including Ian Underwood (keyboards and woodwind), Shuggie Otis (bass), John Guerin (drums), violinists Don 'Sugarcane' Harris and Jean-Luc Ponty, and Captain Beefheart, who contributed growling vocals to 'Willie The Pimp'. *Hot Rats* is regarded by many as Zappa's finest album and contains some of his very best melodic work, such as 'Peaches En Regalia', as well as some of his most inspired electric guitar playing. The album was, furthermore, his most accessible yet, a fact reflected in its commercial success.

1970 saw Zappa involved in movies once more; his first venture was writing and directing *200 Motels*, a series of surrealistic scenes linked by the continuing story of life on the road with the Mothers. Requiring a group to play the film's music, Frank formed a new Mothers line-up that included ex-Turtles singers Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan (alias Flo and Eddie), Ian Underwood, George Duke (keyboards and trombone) and Aynsley Dunbar (drums) – but although the soundtrack music was as complex, funny and imaginative as ever, the film itself was a disappointment. Muddled and self-indulgent, *200 Motels* didn't exactly get rave reviews from the critics.

In May 1971, Frank joined John Lennon and Yoko Ono on stage at the Fillmore East and the resulting jam appeared on Lennon's *Some Time In New York City* album. The new Mothers line-up, meanwhile, recorded *Fillmore East – June 1971* and *Just Another Band From LA*, the latter featuring one of Zappa's mini-operas, 'Billy The Mountain'. The unusual step of releasing two consecutive live albums was probably prompted by Zappa's irritation at the increasing number of live Mothers bootlegs on the market.



The indefatigable Frank Zappa practises his guitar licks (left), and works on a score during a plane journey (right). Zappa has frequently experimented with classical forms, and his orchestral works (below) – influenced by Varèse and Stravinsky – include six pieces which were performed by the London Symphony Orchestra in the early Eighties.



In the autumn of 1971, the Mothers left for a European tour which turned into a disaster: first their equipment was destroyed when the Montreux Casino in Switzerland burned down and then, in December, at a concert at London's Rainbow Theatre, Zappa was thrown from the stage by the jealous husband of one of his fans. He was seriously injured, spent weeks in hospital and the best part of a year in a wheelchair. Ever since the event he has been accompanied everywhere by a very large bodyguard and, whenever possible, has tended to avoid England.

In 1972 Zappa assembled a new team of musicians including a large number of horn players for another solo album, *Waka/Jawaka*, and enlarged the line-up with even more horns for *The Grand Wazoo*. This was followed by *Over Nite Sensation* (1973), the first release on his new Discreet label, and *Apostrophe (')* (1974) which was his most commercial album yet – accessible and non-experimental rock music.

But by now Zappa was firmly established in the top echelon of rock performers; each year he made a world tour and released a couple of albums. This enabled him to give new material a good workout on the road, since his fans were used to being presented with mostly new material at concerts rather than the usual tired run-through of old hits. The accuracy of playing of Zappa's various line-ups and the high quality of his live recording enabled him to build up a huge volume of concert performances which were virtually indistinguishable from studio work and sections of which were often used in the montage of tapes that made up his albums. He released a lot of live material at this time: *Roxy And Elsewhere* was taken from performances during 1973-74 and *One Size Fits All* included tracks from live TV and a Helsinki concert of 1974.

1975 saw Zappa reunited with Captain Beefheart, who came out of retirement and went on the road with his old colleague. This also resulted in a live album, *Bongo Fury*, which was recorded at the Armadillo World Headquarters in Texas but never released in Britain as Virgin Records claimed to have Beefheart under contract.

The torture never stops

Throughout this period the more experimental side of Zappa's work was set to one side, possibly because he was concentrating so much on live work; instead, he provided good solid rock music with provocative lyrics and continued to develop his considerable skill as a guitarist. Then in 1976 Zappa made a move that seemed likely to mark a major commercial breakthrough when he decided to shift from his own Discreet label (distributed by Warners) to Warner Brothers itself in the hope that the company would really get behind his records and promote them.

When Warners heard *Zoot Allures*, however, they were distinctly nervous – particularly about tracks such as 'The Torture Never Stops': 10 minutes of horrible screaming, unpleasant lyrics and guitar solos that were guaranteed to stop any middle-class American dead in his tracks and make him throw up. Even worse, this was followed by 'Ms Pinky', a song about a pink sponge rubber head with a vibrator in it that Zappa found in Amsterdam. Not surprisingly, Warners didn't promote the album to Frank's satisfaction.

Zappa In New York (1978), another live LP (released on Discreet) followed, but was delayed by Warner Brothers' lawyers who were worried about the track 'Punky's Whips'. Frank began the moves to leave Warners and took to displaying a large banner at concerts reading 'Warner Bros Sucks'. Frank couldn't communicate with Warners directly due to litigation, and the

label released three albums pressed from copy tapes and without line-up or recording information: *Studio Tan* (1978), *Sleep Dirt* (1979) and *Orchestral Favorites* (1979), none of which could be termed the most commercial of Frank's works. Frank then formed his own Zappa label, later changing the name to Barking Pumpkin.

Sheik Yerbouti came out in March 1979 and was composed of live tracks from London, New York and Germany. It ran into a little trouble, not from the Arab joke in its title but from the track 'Jewish Princess'. Nonetheless, it was a hit and Frank was actually nominated for two Grammy Awards. This was followed by nothing less than a full-scale rock opera, *Joe's Garage*. '*Joe's Garage* is a stupid story about how the government is going to try to do away with music . . .' Zappa wrote in the sleeve notes. It had all the usual Zappa elements, including a song about nice Catholic girls turning into groupies. It was released on two albums: *Joe's Garage Act 1* and *Joe's Garage Acts 2 & 3*.

In May 1981 another live album, *Tinseltown Rebellion*, was released; this included the old favourites 'Peaches En Regalia' and 'Brown Shoes Don't Make It'. With his own label, Zappa was able to release anything that he wanted and did so: three albums of guitar solos, later issued as a boxed set called *Shut Up And Play Yer Guitar*.

Beyond the valley . . .

You Are What You Is followed in 1981 and *Ship Arriving Too Late To Save A Drowning Witch* (named after the cover drawing) in 1982. The latter contained the minor hit single 'Valley Girl', which was described by Zappa as 'another in a long series of songs about who does what to whom'. He began work on a TV show based on the song and also negotiated merchandising rights for Valley Girl dolls and artefacts.

Zappa announced that he would not tour Europe again because of the rising costs and growing violence at his concerts. He did, however, visit England in 1982 to supervise the recording of six of his orchestral pieces by the 100-strong London Symphony Orchestra, who also performed the pieces at the Barbican Centre. Other plans announced around that time included the reissue of remixed versions of the entire back catalogue of the Mothers of Invention, working on a Broadway musical project, two videos, three films including an 88-minute animated cartoon called *Baby Snakes* – and, of course, releasing more of his own music. 'I don't care if I'm known or remembered, respected or get famous,' the seemingly tireless Zappa has commented. 'The reason I write music is because I like to listen to it, and if there are other people who like to listen to it, then that's fine.'

MILES

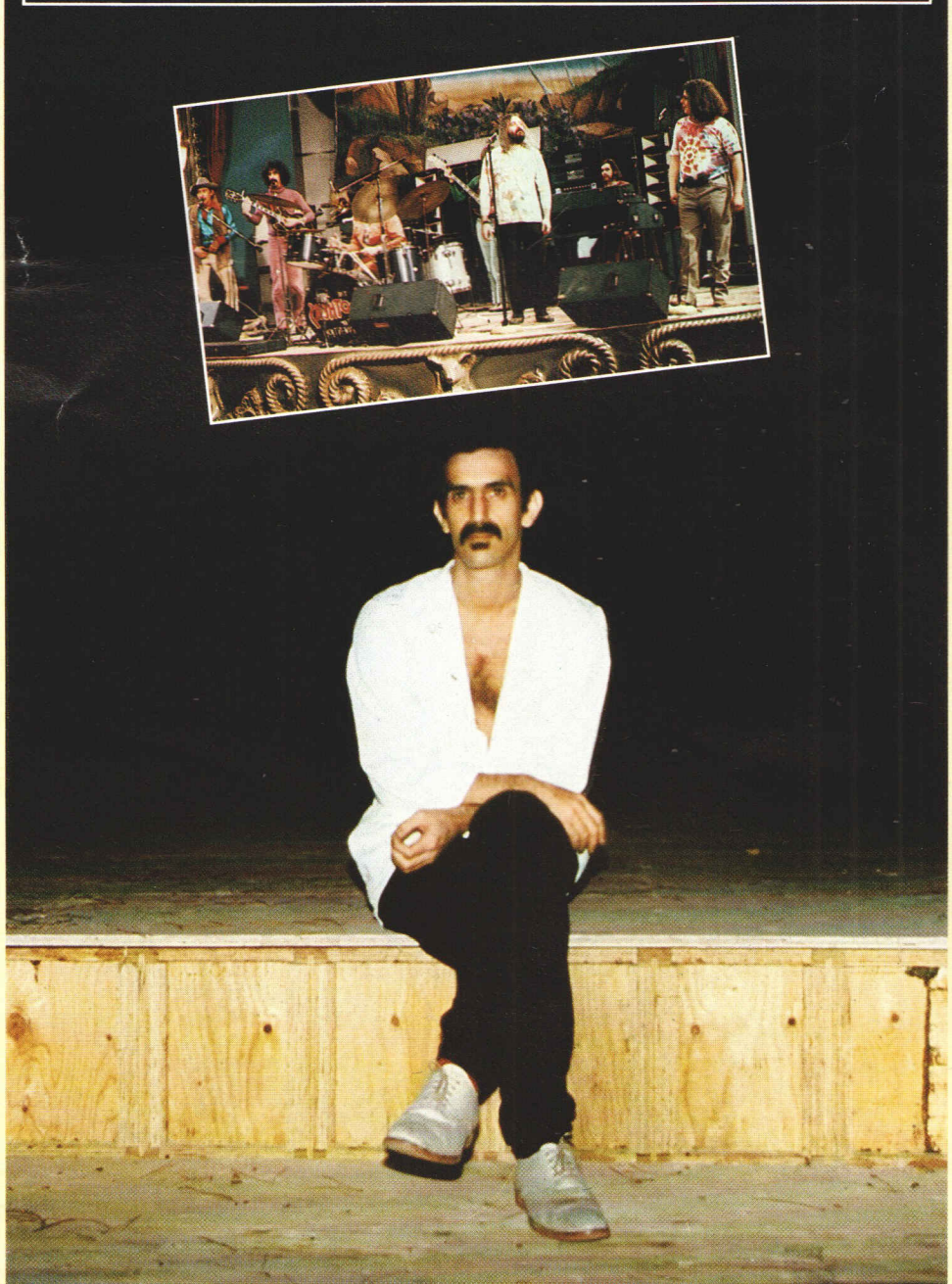
FRANK ZAPPA
Discography

Singles

How Could I Be Such A Fool/Help I'm A Rock (Verve 10418, 1966); How Could I Be Such A Fool/It Can't Happen Here (Verve 10418, 1966); Who Are The Brain Police/Trouble Comin' Every Day (Verve 10458, 1966); Motherly Love/I Ain't Got No Heart (Verve DV 5012, 1966); Big Leg Emma/Why Don't You Do Me Right (Verve 10513, 1967); Mother People/Lonely Little Girl (Verve 10570, 1967); Jelly Roll Gum Drop/Deseri (Verve 10632, 1968); Any Way The Wind Blows/Jelly Roll Gum Drop (Verve 10632, 1968); My Guitar/Dog Breath (Bizarre 0840, 1969); Peaches En Regalia/Little Umbrellas (Bizarre 0889, 1970); WPLJ/My Guitar (Bizarre 0892, 1970); Tell Me You Love Me/Would You Go All The Way . . . (Bizarre 0967, 1970); Magic Fingers/Daddy, Daddy, Daddy (United Artists 50857, 1971); Tears Began To Fall/Junier Mintz Boogie (Bizarre 1052, 1971); Cletus Awreetus Awrightus/Eat That Question (Bizarre 1127, 1972); I'm The Slime/Montana (Discreet 1180, 1973); Don't Eat The Yellow Snow/Cosmic Debris (Discreet 1312, 1974); Find Her Finer/Zoot Allures (Warner Bros 8926, 1976); Disco Boy/Ms. Pinky (Warner Bros 8342, 1976); Dancin' Fool/Baby Snakes (Zappa Z-10, 1979); Joe's Garage/Central Scrutinizer (Zappa Z-31, 1979); I Don't Wanna Get Drafted/Ancient Armaments (Zappa ZR 1001, 1980); Goblin Girl/Pink Napkins (Barking Pumpkin W99 02616, 1981); You Are What You Is/Harder Than Your Husband (Barking Pumpkin W99 02936, 1981); Valley Girl/You Are What You Is (Barking Pumpkin 4W9 03069, 1982).

Albums

Freak Out (Verve V6 5005, 1966); *Absolutely Free* (Verve V6 5013, 1967); *We're Only In It For The Money* (Verve V6 5045, 1968); *Lumpy Gravy* (Verve V6 8741, 1968); *Cruisin' With Ruben And The Jets* (Verve V6 5055, 1968); *Mothermania* (Verve V6 8741, 1968); *Uncle Meat* (Bizarre MS 2024, 1969); *Hot Rats* (Bizarre RS RS 6356, 1969); *Burnt Weenie Sandwich* (Bizarre RS 6370, 1969); *Weasels Ripped My Flesh* (Bizarre MS 2028, 1970); *Chunga's Revenge* (Bizarre MS 2030, 1970); *Fillmore East – June 1971* (Bizarre MS 2042, 1971); *200 Motels* (United Artists UAS 9956, 1971); *Just Another Band From LA* (Bizarre MS 2075, 1972); *Waka/Jawaka* (Bizarre MS 2094, 1972); *The Grand Wazoo* (Bizarre MS 2093, 1972); *Over Nite Sensation* (Discreet MS 2149, 1973); *Apostrophe (')* (Discreet DS 2175, 1974); *Roxy And Elsewhere* (Discreet DS 2202, 1974); *One Size Fits All* (Discreet DS 2216, 1975); *Bongo Fury* (Discreet DS 2234, 1975); *Zoot Allures* (Warner Bros BS 2970, 1976); *Zappa In New York* (Discreet 2D 2290, 1978); *Studio Tan* (Discreet DSK 2291, 1978); *Sleep Dirt* (Discreet DSK 2292, 1979); *Sheik Yerbouti* (Zappa SRZ 2-1501, 1979); *Orchestral Favorites* (Discreet DSK 2294, 1979); *Joe's Garage Act I* (Zappa SRZ 1-1603, 1979); *Joe's Garage Acts II & III* (Zappa SRZ 2-1502, 1979); *Tinsel Town Rebellion* (Barking Pumpkin PW 2-37336, 1981); *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar* (Barking Pumpkin BPR 1111, 1981); *Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar Some More* (Barking Pumpkin BPR 1112, 1981); *Return Of The Son Of Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar* (Barking Pumpkin BPR 1113, 1981); *You Are What You Is* (Barking Pumpkin PW 2-37537, 1981); *Ship Arriving Too Late To Save A Drowning Witch* (Barking Pumpkin 1114, 1982).



Right: Zappa pauses to contemplate his next move. Inset above right: Flo and Eddie, alias Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan of the Turtles, joined the Mothers in 1970.

RAW POWER

Above: Iggy Pop bends over backwards to entertain his audience with his violent, bizarre and scandalous stage act.

The primal punk-rock of Iggy and the Stooges

'I've been through it all. I've been the puppet, the arsehole, the dupe, the junkie and I've come through it and proved I'm the equal to anybody you'd care to mention.' Thus spake Iggy Pop – and if the mere fact of survival confers status, there's no contradicting him. As it happens, there is also the bonus of a series of some of the most enjoyably demented rock'n'roll performances ever to (dis)grace stage or vinyl. A baby-face perched on top of one of the most impressive torsos in the profession, Iggy Pop is by turn petulant, strident, malevolent and repentant – a perfect specimen of the rock regressive.

James Jewel Osterburg was born on 21 April 1947 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a town just to the west of the great US motor city of Detroit. His parents were both schoolteachers and his teens were outwardly unremarkable, although Iggy later commented: 'I was unhappy and self-conscious when young. When I was about 18 I was really loony, got into a series of tremendous car accidents, unbelievable ones where everybody else got killed and I never got scratched. That was the first time in my life I ever felt anything like it – such power and such timelessness.'

Fortunately for Iggy, the second time he felt the power was when he played in a rock'n'roll group – the Iguanas – in which he was both drummer and lead singer. He left to join local rivals the Prime Movers, a blues band, before drifting to Chicago's South Side to play with Sam Lay, the original drummer in Paul Butterfield's Blues Band. Having gained a new name from his first group (Iggy) and a warped blues vision from his subsequent wanderings, he went to Detroit and got down to real business with the formation of the Psychedelic Stooges in 1967. The group comprised Iggy on vocals, Ron Asheton on lead guitar, Dave Alexander on bass and Ron's brother Scott on drums. Legend has it that the group made their debut on Halloween night 1968 in Iggy's old home town of Ann Arbor.

Over the next two years the Stooges built up a reputation as the dumbest, nastiest, most outrageous live act ever to have charmed their way into the hearts of the Midwest of America. As a stage performer, Iggy took everything to excess and then doubled it. A Stooges performance demanded audience participation. Iggy would taunt and bait audiences to a frenzy and then pull one of his bravura stunts: hurling himself into the audience to beat or be beaten (usually the latter); shredding his chest with a broken beer bottle; vomiting; engaging in oral sex with members of the audience; being carried aloft on the upraised hands of his fans.

Elektra Records came, saw and were sufficiently impressed at this display of Dionysian excess to sign up the Stooges (along with fellow Detroit retards the MC5). The result was a 1969 debut LP, called *The Stooges* and produced by John Cale, fresh from his experiences with the Velvet Underground. The first verse of the first track, '1969', summed up the mood of the record perfectly: 'It's 1969 OK/All across the USA/It's another year for me and you/Another year with nothing to do.' The tracks alternated between brutal exorcisms of frustration, such as 'No Fun', later (perhaps inevitably) performed by the Sex Pistols, and celebrations of unholy lust, as in 'I Wanna Be Your Dog'.

Nasty Pop

The group struggled through various personnel changes, though retaining the core of Iggy and the Asheton brothers, and completed a second album, *Fun House*, for Elektra in 1970. Produced by Don Gallucci, it was basically the same mixture as before – but Iggy did enhance his reputation with the inclusion of that masterpiece of paranoia, 'TV Eye', while saxophone added a touch of sophistication to the album. The generous hints of manic depravity on *Fun House* proved more symptomatic of the group's state, however, and the Stooges – by this time including ex-Chosen Few member James Williamson on rhythm guitar – fell apart in 1971 as a result of one drug frenzy too many.

Salvation arrived from an unexpected source. David Bowie and his manager Tony DeFries brought Pop and Williamson to London, wired airfares to the Asheton brothers to join them, and put the reformed Stooges in the studio. With Bowie masterminding the final mix, Williamson co-writing all the songs and providing lead guitar, Ron Asheton demoted to bass and Iggy revitalised, *Raw Power*, released on CBS in 1973, proved to be the Stooges'

finest hour. However, neither the modest success of the album in America nor Bowie and DeFries' MainMan organisation could save the Stooges from their baser instincts, and by the end of 1974 they had split.

The last will and testament appeared in 1976 with the release on Skydog Records of *Metallic KO*, a (very bad) recording of the group's last-ever gig at Detroit's Michigan Palace. The record is subtitled 'Open Up And Bleed', which is apt enough as on the second side of the LP Iggy taunts the audience unmercifully through a trio of 'songs' – 'Rich Bitch', 'Cock In My Pocket' and an X-rated version of 'Louie Louie' – until the persistent shower of bottles and glasses ends the fun.

Iggy Pop retired to the West Coast after the split, recording occasionally and indulging his taste for drugs. Some of the music recorded during this period subsequently appeared on a 1978 album *Kill City*, produced by James Williamson. Considering its haphazard genesis, it is a remarkably coherent achievement, and it also contains one of Iggy's finest love songs in 'Johanna'.

Idiot reflections

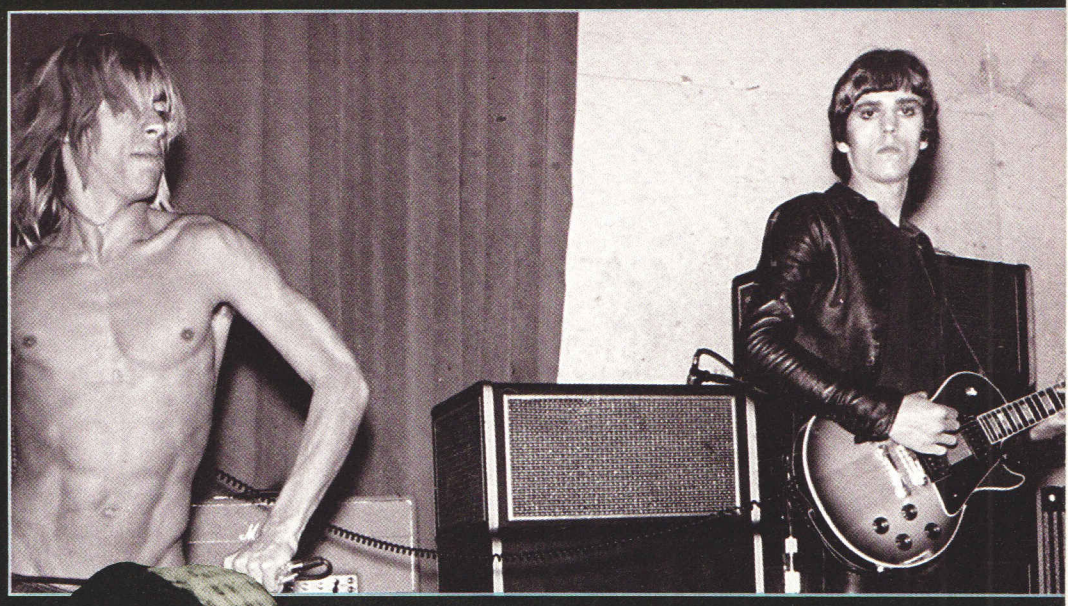
Having cleaned up in hospital in Los Angeles, Iggy teamed up again with long-suffering fan/mentor David Bowie in 1977 to produce two of his most powerful records on RCA. The first of this pair, *The Idiot*, represented something of a catharsis, with Iggy spitting out the bitter dregs of his past experiences in a series of tracks that included the sinister 'Sister Midnight' and a classic of hollow fun, 'Nightclubbing'. He even found time for an elegy to the Stooges in 'Dum Dum Boys'. *Lust For Life* followed quickly and, as its title indicates, represented a return to the artist as barnstormer; the sleazy swing of 'The Passenger' and the manic verve of 'Some Weird Sin' and the title track were joined by a couple of numbers in which Iggy displayed an unhealthy obsession with people turning blue to provide Pop's second great vinyl moment (after *Raw Power*).

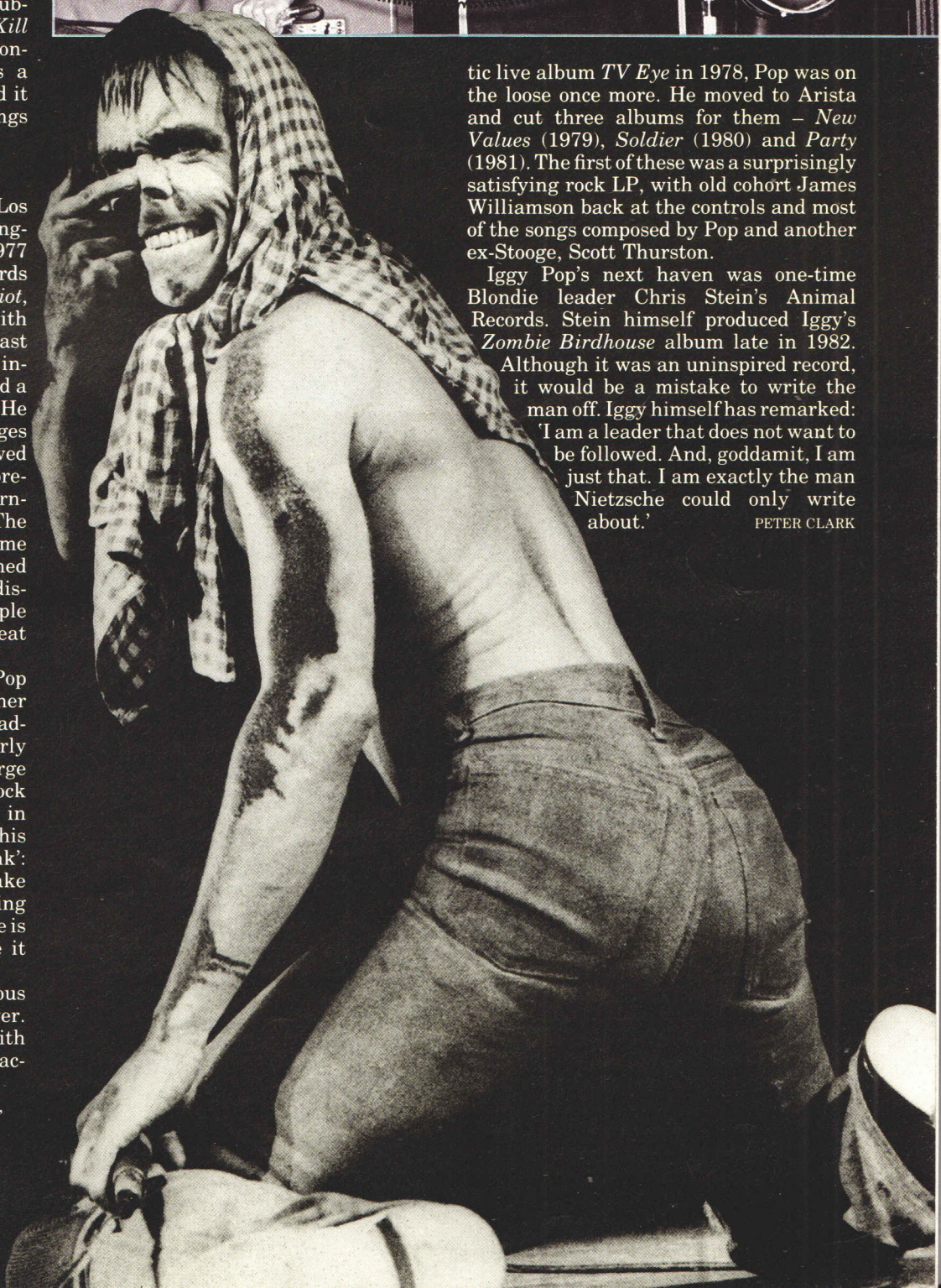
It was entirely characteristic of Iggy Pop that, at the very moment when every other lame-brained UK punk outfit was parading the exhumed carcass of one of his early Stooges classics in its set, he chose to forge ahead with a new brand of electronic rock that possessed a range breathtaking in comparison. Iggy reacted angrily to his new status as 'The Godfather of Punk': 'Some people think that the music I make is just some sort of violence/stomp thing and that everyone who made it before me is dead and most of the ones that made it after me are unemployed.'

The delicate balance of this harmonious relationship was not maintained, however. After wrapping up his RCA contract with the delivery of the somewhat anti-climactic live album *TV Eye* in 1978, Pop was on the loose once more. He moved to Arista and cut three albums for them – *New Values* (1979), *Soldier* (1980) and *Party* (1981). The first of these was a surprisingly satisfying rock LP, with old cohort James Williamson back at the controls and most of the songs composed by Pop and another ex-Stooge, Scott Thurston.

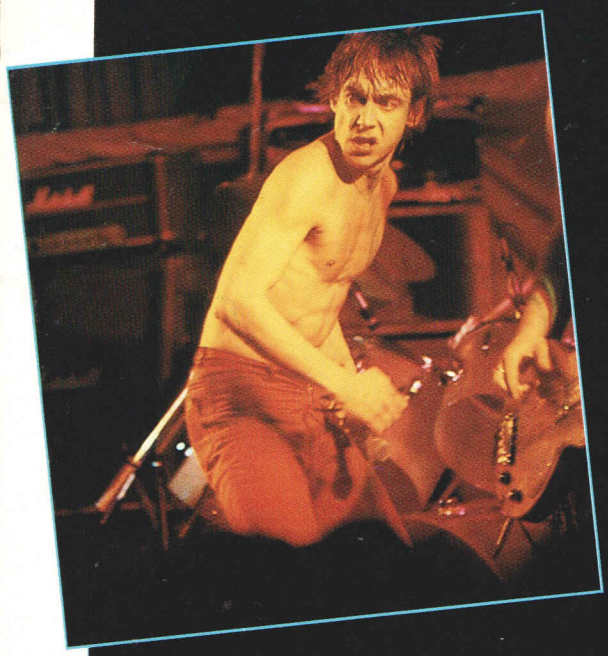
Iggy Pop's next haven was one-time Blondie leader Chris Stein's Animal Records. Stein himself produced Iggy's *Zombie Birdhouse* album late in 1982. Although it was an uninspired record, it would be a mistake to write the man off. Iggy himself has remarked: 'I am a leader that does not want to be followed. And, goddamit, I am just that. I am exactly the man Nietzsche could only write about.'

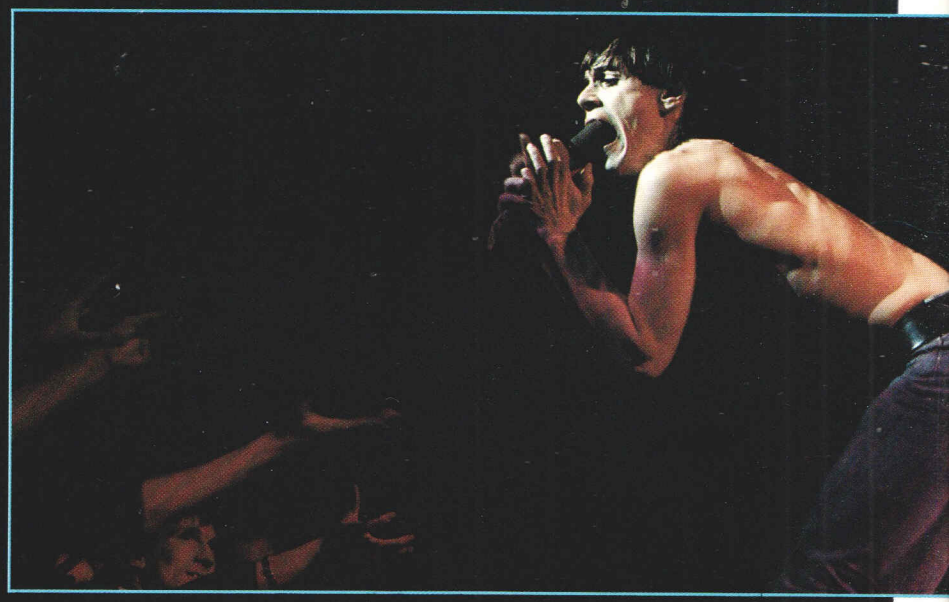
PETER CLARK





Above left: Pop rocks London's Roxy club, 1977. Above right: On stage with cohort James Williamson on guitar. Right: A characteristic Iggy pose.





Above and insets: The chief Stooge displays his well-maintained torso and characteristic lust for live performance with all the snarling animal energy for which he is famed.

Iggy Pop
Recommended Listening

Fun House (Elektra K42032) (Includes: Down On The Street, TV Eye, Dirt, 1970, Fun House, LA Blues, Loose); *Lust For Life* (RCA PL12275) (Includes: Success, The Passenger, Some Weird Sin, Lust For Life, Turn Blue, Tonight).

THE GREAT MUSICIANS

John Entwistle

John Entwistle played a Fender Precision in the Monterey period (above), later graduating to a custom-built Alembic (overleaf).

The emergence of the bass guitar was primarily a matter of convenience – the acoustic double bass was hardly the most portable or powerful of instruments. However, it took time for rock players to take full advantage of the possibilities offered and regard the new electric bass as more than just a means of 'holding down the bottom end' with greater volume. When John Entwistle took up the bass guitar in the early Sixties and joined a band named the Detours, his inspirations were guitar-players like Duane Eddy and Chet Atkins. Since then, the distinctive style he developed during two decades with the Who (as the Detours soon became) has made him a model for many – perhaps the nearest thing to a bass-guitar hero in British rock.

Much of Entwistle's quirky style was initially dictated by the playing of Pete Townshend. As the guitarist of a basic three-piece instrumental band, Townshend sprayed fat barre chords around with abandon, leaving the intricacies, if any, to Entwistle. Recorded evidence of this was provided by the Who's first single (released as the High Numbers). A standard R&B workout, 'I'm The Face' was enlivened only by Entwistle's bass bursts punctuating the song at the end of each 12-bar phrase.

The best was yet to come, however, as songwriter Townshend encouraged the stolid, quietly-spoken bass player to push his playing to the fore. The composer's demo of 'My Generation' illustrated this perfectly when released as a flexi-disc in 1982, some 17 years after its recording. The zooming and plunging bass breaks of the single version were anticipated, on Townshend's demo, by a rather ineffectual 'swooshing' on the acoustic guitar's bass strings, inviting the inspired improvisation with which the single is identified. Entwistle used a Danelectro bass on the recording, but had broken the strings of two identical instruments prior to the final take: as no spare strings could readily be found for the American-made bass, he had been forced to purchase two identical replacement guitars to complete the session at the fifth attempt.

Although the Danelectro was trebly enough to reproduce the Duane Eddy runs that had inspired Entwistle to take up the bass, he experimented with other makes through the Who's career. One of the longest-serving was a composite instrument, built from three Fender Precisions and a Jazz Bass that he had destroyed, which he used for five years at the end of the Sixties. During this period, his style remained percussive and attacking, as he used all four fingers of the right hand to extract the maximum from the strings. On the eve of the Who's showstopping performance at Monterey in June 1967, he revealed that he was in the habit of playing most of the stage set at two-thirds volume, turning up for the closing numbers to back up Townshend and Moon's more obvious activities with an insidious, earth-shaking rumble. At that time, he used Sound City amplification, while ten years later he was playing through Sunn amps and cabs on stage, combining Music Man and Mesa Boogie amps for studio work.

The relationship between Townshend and Entwistle has lasted through their professional careers and each has tailored his contribution to the work of the other. Townshend's use of drone notes in his chords has led to Entwistle becoming much more lively in his playing. Not that this rubbed off on his stage demeanour; Townshend's own sleeve-note for 1973's *Quadrophenia*, looking at the Who through the eyes of a Mod, commented: 'The bass player was a laugh. He never did anything. Nothing . . . his bass sounded like a bleeding VC10.' Listeners to the album had only to wait for the second track on side one, 'The Real Me', to appreciate the comparison between Entwistle's booming bass and the jet plane.

The 'lead bass' style so evident on 'The Real Me' reappears on occasion in the Who's work. Another notable example was 'Dreaming From The Waist' on *The Who By Numbers* (1975), where the bassist again left guitarist Townshend firmly in the shade. Entwistle's spider's-web pattern of bass runs underpinning guitar and vocal caused some confusion when the song was first played live, as Townshend recalls: 'John's doing his bloody bass solo . . . and I'm just there strumming a chord. And the audience looks at me and goes "How does he do it? How does he produce that noise?"'

Entwistle's guitar collection is legendary, and numbers around 200 instruments. These include Rickenbackers (his favoured basses at the time the Who had their Marquee residency in late 1964), Fender Jazz and Precisions, the Gibson RD Artist (on which John collaborated with the designers) and, most impressive of all, a dozen four and eight-string basses custom-built by Alembic in California. He adopted the make around 1976, and was pictured with his favoured instrument on the cover of his solo album *Too Late The Hero* (1981). The instrument featured mains (rather than battery) powered on-board electronics, supplied by a dual-purpose guitar/power lead that also fed light-emitting diodes in the neck.

Sadly, *Too Late The Hero* turned out to be an undistinguished collection of American-inspired hard rock devoid of Entwistle's customary dynamism. In attempting to build songs around his eight-string bass riffs, Entwistle simply proved that his fingers functioned more efficiently out of the songwriting spotlight. Although opportunities to show off his expert bass-playing became more limited in the early Eighties, with the Who's infrequent tours and album releases, this in no way invalidates John Entwistle's contribution to the art of rock bass-playing that has seen the Jam's Bruce Foxton and others pay overt homage to his mastery.

MICHAEL HEATLEY

THE HISTORY OF
Rock